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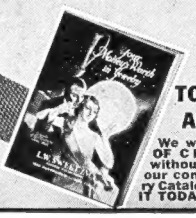

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Frontier Stories

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Face to ugly face, they met—MacCarger and The Butcher—to sate a bitterness fiercer than the Legion's lash.

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Lost gold on the River of Death! But demon arms of the jungle barred the path, to snare El Bruto's prey.

COMPLETE WESTERN NOVELET

FREE RANGE — **Walt Coburn** — **60**

Devlin greenhorned into Yaqui Land. Nono rallied his hordes for a six-gun lesson.

FRONTIER SHORT STORIES

EGGS OF AFRICA — **A. de Herries Smith** — **78**

Neither spearmen nor gunboats could scare the two back without the sergeant's eggs.

THE FATAL FIFTEENTH — **J. E. Grinstead** — **87**

Giant saws screamed a doom chant . . . The monster of the mill was roused again.

THE MISSING LIGHTHOUSE — **Warren Hastings Miller** — **97**

Out of the misted sea they came—a hundred howling devils on the trail of loot.

SWAMP OF THE SPEARMEN — **Kenneth Gilbert** — **109**

Furred killers swarmed in the nests of the marshlings—till a winged fury struck.

WORLD ADVENTURERS — **Frontier Readers** — **116**

A chat with our globe trotters on distant adventure lanes.

THE TRADING POST — **Authors' Corner** — **120**

Here frontiersman meets the men who tell his story.

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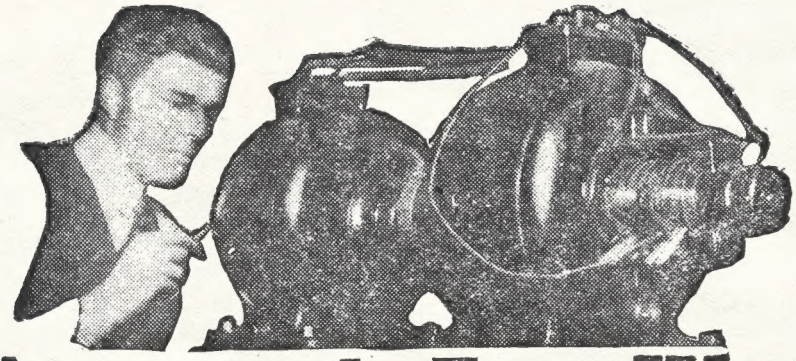

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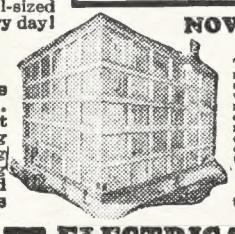

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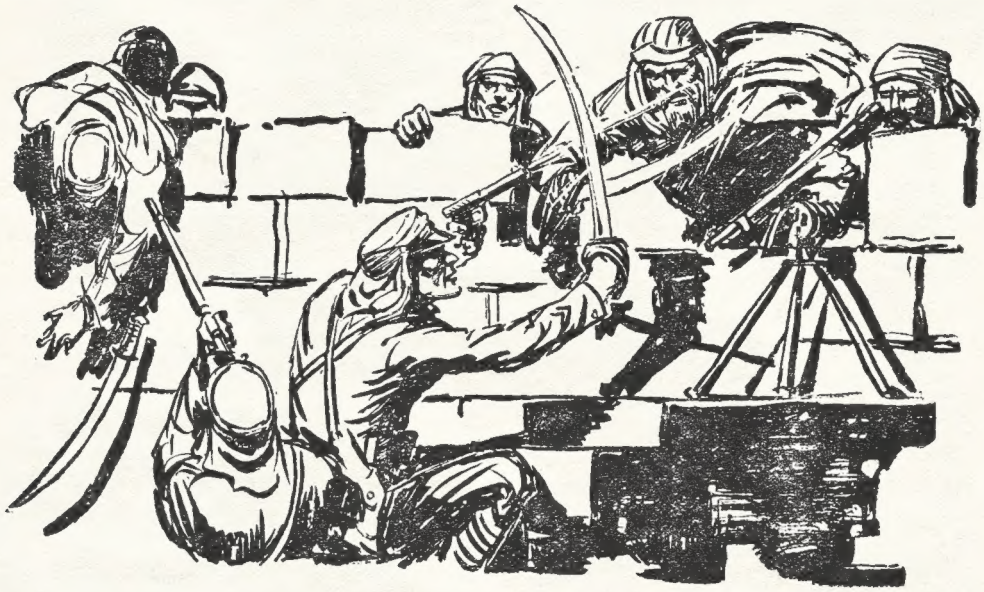

THE SHANGHAIED LEGIONNAIRE

By BOB DU SOE

Author of "The Ghost of Allah," etc.

In Algeria it happened . . . the eerie end of a feud of the bleeding sands. Face to ugly face, they met—MacCarger and The Butcher—to sate a bitterness fiercer than the Legion's lash.

COMPLETE FRONTIER NOVEL

MacCARGER had realized for some time that he was aboard a train instead of a boat. The rumble and jar was about the same as in his bunk over the old *Valdura's* propeller, but the pitch and roll was decidedly different.

The first real spark of consciousness came when the train ground to a stop at Aubagne. A man and woman entered the compartment and settled themselves in the seat opposite. Don MacCarger sat up then, in an effort to force a few intelligent thoughts through his befuddled brain.

He tried to think of some logical reason for his being there. Why had he

left Toulon? He recalled that he had been drinking, which meant that he had probably gotten drunk. But what had put the idea into his head to board a train? Where was he going?

The couple opposite would know that. He would ask them. No, he had forgotten; they were speaking French and he did not know a word of it.

He took a close look at the man then, for the first time. That did more to sober him than anything else could have.

The Frenchman's two black, close-set eyes bored into him from beneath one solid, bristling eyebrow that grew straight across his forehead. They were hard and cruel like the mouth below, a slot rather than a mouth, screened also by a thick growth of wiry hair.

MacCarger shifted his gaze toward the open window. Then he glanced back again as the man turned toward the woman.

Don MacCarger had knocked around a little during the last ten years of his twenty-odd, and had come in contact with some hard cases, but never anything quite like the bullet-headed, bull-necked man across the narrow aisle. He wondered for a moment what relation the woman could possibly be to him. She was no beauty; but in spite of the unmistakable lines of dissipation, she seemed to be cast from better stuff.

No, he was very sure he would receive no help from them.

HE tried again to collect his thoughts —to trace his movements from the time he had left the ship.

There had been four in the party as they walked up from the dock. There had been the deck engineer, two oilers and himself. The engineer had fallen for the beguiling smiles of a painted, gaudily-dressed *cocotte* at the first café, and they had left him.

There had been a bar after that—two bars—and another café where the cook and steward had joined them. The oilers, he remembered, had not received their shipmates very graciously, and in a short time they had started out again without them. What they had done from then on, however, remained a mystery. He must find out which way he was headed and get back to the ship as soon as possible.

It occurred to him then that he must have had a ticket in order to board the train, and that the ticket would surely name his destination. He made a search of his pockets. He found the ticket—second class to Marseilles. But that was all.

His papers were gone, his wallet, everything. He had been polished off cleaner than the brasswork in the skipper's bath. The oilers were responsible; there was no doubt about it. They had shipped him out of Toulon to get rid of him.

"Damn their lousy hides, I'll beat 'em both to a pulp! They can't—"

The angry exclamation ended in a groan. MacCarger remembered suddenly that the *Valdura* was sailing on the morning tide. It was morning now. She was probably already out on the Mediterranean, wallowing along toward the Straits. What an ass! What a fool he was! But how could he know his own shipmates would turn out a pair of thugs?

The only thing was to go straight to the American Consul when he reached Marseilles. With no money, no papers, nothing to prove his name, nationality or occupation his reception would be a cold one. The ports of the Mediterranean held no mercy for stranded Americans. But he had to do something.

BUSY with his own thoughts, and unable to understand what was said, MacCarger had paid no attention to the agitated tone of the conversation going on across from him. It reached a point now, however, where he could not very well help it.

The woman seemed to be on the verge of tears; the ugly face of the man was

distorted with anger. Giving her hell about something, MacCarger decided, and was just a bit thankful that the rage was not directed at himself. He would probably have landed on the Frenchman's jaw by this time, and gotten his neck wrung for doing so.

There is nothing like cold water for a throbbing head. Hoping to find some in the washroom at the end of the coach, MacCarger left the compartment and worked his way along the narrow passage.

He found the water, not as cold as he would have preferred, but it was wet and at least cooling. When he had bathed his head and swallowed a pint or two, he felt better. His tongue was thick, his thoughts still a bit muddled, but time, he knew from experience, would remedy that.

There was a man waiting in the passage when he unlocked the door—a young man about his own weight and build, and decidedly blond. Thinking he might be an Englishman, MacCarger spoke to him.

"Good morning. Do you happen to know what time we are due in Marseilles?"

The man frowned and shook his head.

"Ich nicht vorstehen."

MacCarger took out his ticket and pointed to the word "Marseilles."

"Ich weist nicht! Das ist alles," the German replied impatiently, and shoved his way into the washroom.

"Go to the devil, then," MacCarger muttered, starting back along the passage.

He had no baggage, and there was no reason why he should have returned to the same compartment to listen to the further bellowing of the angry Frenchman. He did, nevertheless, glancing in at the different compartments on the way. He hoped to find someone who looked as if he might speak English. But there were not more than a half-dozen passengers in the entire coach and they all looked like Europeans.

At the entrance to the last compartment, the one he had occupied, MacCarger stopped. He was wondering if it would be worth while to continue on through the train. He had about decided that it would be a good idea when he noticed that the heated conversation within had ceased. Turning, he glanced through the door.

For a moment MacCarger stood there, dumb with horror. Cold shivers raced up his spine. He took a step forward and peered down at the limp form sprawled between the two seats. It was the woman, dead, a knife buried to the hilt in her breast.

A gust of smoke filled the compartment. Hazily he noted that the window had been opened. The man had disappeared.

"GOOD God—murdered!" MacCarger found his voice at last. He knelt down to examine the woman more closely. He put out a hand to touch the knife, drew it back again with a shudder. He started to rise.

"Nom de Dieu!" a voice exclaimed at his back.

MacCarger turned. One of the train officials stood glaring at him with a look of horror that equaled his own. The expression changed in a second to one of mingled anger and accusation. It flashed through MacCarger's brain that the trainman believed he was responsible.

"No, no!" he fairly screamed, and pointed to the open window.

The accusing frown only deepened.

"It was that damn Frenchman!" MacCarger made a frantic effort to explain. He jumped through the window. If you'll stop the train maybe we can catch him."

The trainman said something in French, but instead of complying with the suggestion, he shoved his way into the compartment and made a move to close the door.

MacCarger swore. The meaning back

of that move filled him with sudden dread.

In an instant he realized the danger of his position—how incriminating his actions must have appeared. He had no proof of his innocence—no explanation, even, of his presence on the train. He had no papers to prove his identity, which, above all, he had been given to understand, was essential in any dealings with the French police.

He could not defend himself, and had no money to hire it done. Escape, at that moment, seemed the only way out. With that one thought in mind, he swung on the trainman's jaw.

With a grunt, the man went down, and MacCarger stepped over him, out of the compartment. He closed the door, glanced hastily up and down. Then he started along the passage.

Disguise was the next thing. The cut of his clothes and the style of his hat screamed American in every line. The door to the washroom opened as he neared it, and the German he had tried to question a few minutes before stepped out.

ONE look at the man, and MacCarger's decision was made. He had seen the word "Marseilles" painted in huge red letters on the side of an embankment. There was no time to lose. The trainman, too, was apt to recover at any moment.

"Get in there!" he ordered, and shoved the German back into the washroom.

"Was ist das?" the man demanded.

MacCarger had no idea what he said. He cared less. He closed the door and tore off his coat. Holding it out, he made it clear that he wanted to trade.

"Nein, nein!" the German protested, and made a break for the door.

MacCarger had neither time nor words to waste. He jerked him away from the door and slammed him back in the corner.

The German grumbled something that sounded very much like an oath, and let fly with his fist. It caught MacCarger alongside the ear and spun him around. But the desperate American had stopped punches like that before. He ducked the next blow and waded in.

Twice he landed with all his strength, and then he was reminded that the ethics of battle vary with the temperament. A number ten boot caught him square in the stomach, lifted him off the floor.

MacCarger was mad now. And when he was mad, he was dangerous to fool with. He was gifted with two good fists and he knew all the tricks of an East River stevedore. He battered his way in under the German's none too accurate blows.

One vicious swing he stopped on the point of his elbow, then butted with his head. The German lurched forward and MacCarger finished him off with a short-arm jab to the chin.

MacCarger stripped the unconscious man of his coat and hat. Hastily he put them on and stepped out into the passage. The train had slowed down. He could see that it was entering a fair-sized station. A number of people standing near the compartment at the other end of the coach gave evidence that the gruesome tragedy had been discovered. The group parted. The trainman appeared, waving his arms excitedly.

MacCARGER ducked hurriedly through the vestibules into the next coach. He had no way of knowing whether he had been recognized. He would keep moving until he could get off. The passage was blocked, however, by others waiting for the train to stop. The trainman caught up with him just as the attendant outside jerked open the door.

MacCarger climbed down to the platform. He was hastening toward the exit. Then he felt in the pockets of his borrowed coat for the ticket that he knew would be demanded at the gate. There was no ticket. He cursed himself for not having kept his own. He searched again, more carefully.

There was excitement, plenty of it, back on the platform. But so far he seemed to have escaped attention.

It was no use; there was no ticket. He did, however, discover an envelope addressed to the Bureau of something-or-other at Sidi-Bel-Abbes, Africa. Opening it, he found an official appearing document with seals and signatures, and a frequent repetition of the word *Guerre. Guerre,* he knew meant war, and that stood for something military.

In desperation MacCarger decided to use it for what it was worth. He was determined to get out of the station even if he had to make a break for it.

"Le billet, Monsieur!" The gateman put out his hand for a ticket.

MacCarger shook his head.

"Billet—teekit!" the gateman repeated impatiently.

MacCarger's trump card had belonged to a German, so it would not do to speak English. He shook his head again, and took out the envelope, fearful that at any second he would be pounced upon from behind by the infuriated trainman.

The gateman glanced at the contents of the envelope.

"Legion Etrangère," he grunted.

He called to a man in uniform who stood near by. There was more discussion regarding the *billet,* and then the man in uniform handed the document back to MacCarger and motioned for him to follow. He was through the gate, and in the hands of a soldier instead of a policeman, so he went almost gladly.

CHAPTER II

LEGION OF THE DAMNED

MacCARGER paid slight attention to where he was going as he walked along with the soldier. So much had happened in so short a time he could think of little else.

Before he realized it, the gates of Fort St. Jean yawned in front of him. Fort St. Jean is the depot at Marseilles for the Nineteenth Army Corps of France.

Had Don MacCarger known then what awaited him beyond those gates, he would have dashed back to the station and begged the trainman to arrest him. The two words, *"Legion Etrangère,"* muttered by the gateman should have been a warning. He thought of them many times in the months that followed, but at the time he had scarcely heard them.

He came to his senses with a start, but it was too late then to do anything about it. Two coal-black Senegalese with red fezzes and khaki-colored *capotes* stood on either side of the entrance. Just inside was another uniformed negro. On the cheeks of all three were ugly scars that looked as if they might have been made with a red-hot waffle iron.

MacCarger's guide led him to a cold, barren office at one end of an immense barrack. There another officer, a Frenchman this time, examined his papers and looked him over as a judge at a stock show might have sized up a prize ox. Apparently satisfied, he returned the papers, and muttered an order to the soldier.

The man saluted; then escorted the American down a long corridor. MacCarger found himself in a room with five other men attired in civilian clothes like himself.

When the soldier had gone, the men come forward, each plying questions in a different tongue. Out of the jumble but one sentence was intelligible to MacCarger. It was spoken by the one man of the five from whom he least expected a word of English.

He was short, wiry and dark, with a head of shiny hair that waved like a prima donna's. Had his beard been a year old instead of a week, it no doubt would have curled, also.

"AMERICAN, aren't you?" he repeated. His black eyes shone with friendliness.

MacCarger could not help answering.

"You guessed it," he returned, "and I wish to hell I was back there."

The little man shoved out his hand and his thin lips parted in a smile.

"So do I, but they kicked me out twice, so I've decided they don't want me."

MacCarger took the offered hand. "Kicked you out? Then you are not an American."

"Oh, I'm as much that as anything. Don't know exactly what I am. My name is Peyron, though. I'm sure of that. . . . Glad you happened along."

"What is this place?" MacCarger inquired. "What are you fellows doing here?"

"Joined when you were drunk, eh?" Peyron laughed. "Well, from what I've heard of the outfit, you'll have plenty of time to sober up. This is the beginning of a stretch in the famous French Foreign Legion."

"The army!" MacCarger exclaimed.

"And then some," the little man added. "We ship for Oran this afternoon. You talk like you'd never heard of the Legion."

MacCarger had heard of it in a way. Somewhere he had read a story about it—the story of a company of devils, captained by Satan himself. It had made good reading, but he had no desire to take part in anything like it.

"Suppose a man changes his mind?" he inquired. "What would be the chances of—of—deserting?"

"Damn slim." Peyron shook his head. "They have a way in this country of checking up on a fellow."

MacCarger's uneasiness increased. It began to look as if he had jumped from the frying pan into something a great deal hotter. Having served a hitch in Uncle Sam's Navy, he had little use for the army, to say nothing of one that sent its men tramping around the Sahara Desert.

THROUGH the rest of the morning, he paced the floor and smoked Peyron's vile cigarets in an effort to decide what he had better do.

Finally the arrival of another recruit settled the question for him. The man carried a French newspaper which Peyron immediately appropriated. When he had scanned the headlines, he eyed MacCarger suspiciously.

"Didn't happen to come from Toulon this morning, did you?" he asked.

"No," MacCarger answered promptly. "I came from Paris."

"No, you didn't, because you were here in the barracks before the morning train from Paris arrived. That doesn't matter, though; you don't look to me as if you'd cut the throat of a helpless female and then try the same thing on the train inspector."

MacCarger did his best to appear unconcerned. "What are you talking about?"

"Murder," the little man replied. "The paper says that the brute who committed the crime was either English or American. The trainman was the only one who saw him, and he doesn't seem to have gotten a very good description of him."

Thank heavens, MacCarger thought, but what had become of the German? Why hadn't he been heard from? As a recruit for the Legion, he should have turned up at the fort. That was something that had not occurred to him. And the idea was far from pleasing.

The chances were, though, that the German had seen the theft of his papers as a good way to back out of his enlistment and had decided to say nothing about it. MacCarger hoped that was it, anyway. It was the thing he would have done.

"They are watching all roads leading from the town," Peyron continued to read, "so there is no chance of the poor devil getting away. Arrest is expected at any minute."

"How do they know they're after the right man?"

"There doesn't seem to be any doubt about that. The trainman caught him in the act. He had to battle with the fool to keep him from jumping out the window, so he'll know him all right when they catch him."

MacCarger muttered an oath. He was glad he had swung on the trainman's jaw.

"Garde à vous!—Suivez-moi!" a soldier barked at the doorway.

The little band of recruits sprang to their feet.

"That means 'Attention! . . . Follow me,'" Peyron translated. "Come on, Yank, we're on our way."

MacCarger nodded. He trailed out of the barrack room with the others, resigned to his fate. He could see no other way out of it.

They went down to the quay, where an antiquated little steamer was receiving the last of her cargo, and were herded on board. From a corner of the littered deck, MacCarger watched the seamen cast off the lines. He knew that they were under way.

A half-hour later the jetty lay far astern. The vessel was headed across the Mediterranean for the ancient port of Oran.

CHAPTER III

DEVIL'S BRAND

SIDI-BEL-ABBES, the Foreign Legion Headquarters in the Department of Oran, is a city both enchanting and hideous. Which depends upon the temperament of the person who observes it. The Place Sadi Carnot, where the Legion band gives its nightly concerts, might easily have been copied from a quarter of Paris; the *Village d'Espagnol* or the *Village Nègre* might have been lifted from a corner of Hades.

MacCarger, as he trudged up the hill toward the great stone barracks of the Legion, at least found it interesting. He even allowed himself to think that the future might prove an adventure worth while. The prospect, at any rate, was more pleasing than that of hanging by the neck until dead.

"Les bleus! Les bleus! The recruits!" A shout went up as the little company filed through the tiny portal beside the immense, iron-studded barrack gate. Men came running from every direction for a glimpse of the new arrivals. The sergeant of the guard received them. He lined them up and welcomed them in the only language a Legionnaire is supposed to understand.

"Sapristi, what a batch of tripe! Scum! Cripples! There is not the making of a soldier in the whole worthless lot!"

To the uninitiated, the tirade sounded very much as if the forlorn little group was indeed the poorest gathering of humanity in the Legion's history. It would not have surprised any of them had their papers been torn up, and they themselves thrown bodily out into the road.

"Paul Heinrich!" the sergeant read from a slip of paper. He glanced up to see who would answer.

No one answered. He barked the name again, impatiently.

The seven men cast sidelong glances at one another, wondering who among them had forgotten his latest alias.

"PAUL HEINRICH!" the sergeant roared, his face growing red with rage.

PAUL HEINRICH. . . . The name flashed through MacCarger's brain and he turned a red that was a match for the sergeant's.

"Here," he answered meekly. It was the name he had seen on the German's papers.

"'Cré nom de nom de Dieu!" The sergeant burst into a stream of oaths. "Son of a pig, a dog, a goat, what is the matter with you? Do you not know your own name?"

Don MacCarger—Paul Heinrich had no idea of the terrible things that were

being said about him. He only wished that there was a rat hole convenient that he might crawl down into it.

"Wie heissen sie?" the sergeant demanded.

MacCarger knew less about German than he did French.

"What in hell does he want now?" he inquired of Peyron.

"Your name. Tell him your name," Peyron whispered.

"To the devil with him. I answered once. He's only trying to make a monkey out of me now."

"Garde à vous!" the sergeant bellowed. "You are at attention, fool. For that talking you will get four hours at *plut*—hear me? And you will repeat your name while you march. By the *bon Dieu,* if you do not know it, I will teach it to you."

MacCarger was still at a loss to know what it was all about. He was stripped of his coat and forced to exchange his shoes for a pair of rope sandals. He surmised that he was in for some sort of punishment. When an eighty pound sack of sand was strapped to his shoulders, and he was told to march, there was no longer any doubt about it.

"En avant—marche!" The corporal in charge gave the order. *"Un Deux!* One! Two! Paul Heinrich! Paul Heinrich!"

MacCarger took a half-dozen steps, then he stopped. The injustice of the whole thing suddenly filled him with anger. He had forgotten his name, but there was nothing criminal about that—not from any standpoint of right or wrong that he had ever heard of. His stubborn, Scotch temper revolted to the core. He refused to move another inch.

THE corporal cursed him and shoved him, but his efforts were wasted. Had he been one who understood his fellow men, he would have read a warning in his victim's mounting color. When MacCarger's firm jaw snapped shut and his dark blue eyes began to smoulder, it was time to let him alone.

"You lay your dirty paws on me again," he declared, "and I'll bust you on the nose."

The corporal promptly did the very thing he had been warned not to. And Don MacCarger kept his promise. With a swing that started a yard away, he spread the man's nose over the greater part of his bewhiskered countenance.

He proceeded then to relieve himself of the back-breaking load in anticipation of the fellow's recovery. He had an idea he had committed a breach of military ethics, but at that moment the fact did not worry him.

The corporal staggered to his feet. He was bleeding like a stuck pig and squealing worse. He did not offer to fight, much to MacCarger's disgust. What was the use? The dog of a *bleu* had committed the most heinous offense known to the Legion. He had both refused to obey orders and deliberately hit a superior officer. The things that could be done to him in the name of punishment for either unpardonable sin were unbelievable.

The corporal's yells brought help from the guard. Bayonets pricked at his ribs and MacCarger was marched off across the parade ground and thrown into the *salle de police.*

Jails and prisons in France are the worst of any civilized country on earth. The *boîte dèboîtée* of the Legion at Sidi-Bel-Abbes is no exception.

A sloping shelf along the side of the rough stone wall answered as a bunk. The slope was just enough so that a man could not relax without slipping down against the footboards, and he could not stretch out in the trough at the bottom without danger of being walked on.

There was a floor, to be sure, but a drunken man is never particular where he makes his litter, and the number of drunks always far outnumbered the sober. They were shoved in at all hours of the night, cursing and fighting; they were dragged out in the morning to be sentenced. A hog would have turned

up its nose at the sloppy mess that was doled out as food. Of water there was barely enough to drink.

For one whole week MacCarger remained there, cursing France, the Legion and everyone in it, himself included. There was not a man in all the hard-bitten, mixed-up lot that came and went who could speak a word of English.

Try as he would, he could not get the various guards to give him more than an uncivil grunt. When at last one of them actually called him aside and led him out to a wash trough, he was sure he was dreaming.

This sudden act of kindness, he soon discovered, was not prompted by humanity at all, but for the benefit of the court which had condescended that morning to consider his case—the case of a raw recruit who had disobeyed his very first orders and punched a corporal to boot.

THE trial was strictly in accordance with the military laws of the Legion. On the bench sat a colonel, a major, two captains and a sergeant-major. In addition there was a prosecutor who damned MacCarger to the very depths, and an attorney for the defence, a dapper young captain, who really proved to be human.

It was taken for granted that the prisoner did not understand French. An interpreter was allowed. The interpreter, however, spoke German instead of English, and MacCarger was no better off than before.

It was a point that caused comment in spite of the protests of the prosecutor; so much comment, in fact, that another interpreter was brought in to see which side was right. At last MacCarger was addressed in a language that he understood. The trial proceeded.

There were witnesses for the prosecution, the sergeant, the corporal, and a dozen others, but not one for the defence. No one, not even the dapper young captain, could think of any possible reason or excuse for the prisoner's inexcusable, unmilitary conduct.

The captain did, however, stress the fact that the miserable recruit could not have understood what had been said to him, and that he was too new a soldier a realize what he had done. On these grounds, he placed the prisoner on the mercy of the court. The case was rested.

There was much conversation after that, of which MacCarger understood not a word. Finally the interpreter repeated the sentence as the president of the court announced it.

"The court," he said in careful English, "owing to your lack of training and inexperience in military matters, has decided to let you off with three months confinement to barracks. It will still be necessary, however, for you to serve the four hours *plut* as first ordered, and four hours in addition to that for the indiscretion of having refused it before.

"I might add, unofficially, that you had better take it and be glad you didn't get worse. They could very easily have sent you to the penal battalion."

MacCarger had no idea what that meant, but if it was anything like the hole he had just come from, he certainly did not want to try it. It hurt his pride to go back and begin the *plut* again, with four hours more thrown in, but the *salle de police* had been a wonderful place to lay awake nights and think things over.

"All right," he muttered to the interpreter. "There's no justice to it, but I guess I'm the goat. I'll take my medicine. Tell them to bring on their damn *plut* so I can get it over with."

HIS feet were again bound in the rope sandals. The eighty pound sack was strapped to his back. They started him marching around the parade ground.

"Un! Deux! One! Two! Paul Heinrich!" the corporal barked, and MacCarger took up the chant.

"Paul Heinrich! Paul Heinrich!" he muttered in rhythm with his step.

Slowly but surely, as the sergeant had promised, he learned his name. Born of an aching back and bleeding feet, it became a part of him.

"Paul Heinrich! Paul Heinrich!"

The mutter changed to a groan as he continued to march. The straps cut into his back like narrow strips of iron; the coarse rope sandals cut his feet as if he trod barefoot on a path strewn with glass. He ceased to march. It was all he could do to stagger. But he had said that he would take his medicine, and he had meant it.

One hour—two hours—three hours, he tramped around the parade ground. Every muscle in his strong young body cried out in protest. He stumbled and fell. The corporal dragged him to his feet and drove him on.

Another hour and another. . . . He kept at it until he could not have told whether he walked or crawled. But through it all one foot was PAUL and the other HEINRICH.

"Paul Heinrich! Paul Heinrich!"

His brain throbbed with the words long after his tongue grew thick and his voice failed. And then at last when a bucket of water was thrown in his face and he opened his eyes to gaze up into the leering visage of the sergeant, he answered without even being asked—"Paul Heinrich."

CHAPTER IV

FREED!

ON the top floor of one of the huge stone barracks was a long room lined with small iron cots — spotlessly clean. There Soldier of the Second Class, No. 83247, Paul Heinrich, took up his interrupted career as a Legionnaire.

Peyron, who had learned many things in that one short week, showed him how to fold his uniforms and how to arrange his *paquetage* on the shelf above his head. He taught him a few French commands. Among other things, Peyron informed him that the non-commissioned officers rated salutes.

"They are devils, Heinrich," the little man declared, "Steer clear of them. We had a new sergeant at drill today—a brute. They call him 'Saigneur'—the butcher, the bloody, and he sure as hell looks it."

"I haven't seen any of them yet who looked like angels of mercy," the man Heinrich replied. "You forget I've had a little experience with the skunks myself."

"No I don't. You got a tough break," Peyron admitted, "but you showed poor judgment, bustin' that *cabo* on the nose like you did. Some of these old-timers were betting you'd get a year at labor."

"I heard something to that effect, too," Heinrich nodded. "They were very considerate—tried to kill me off in one day instead of dragging it out."

"Well, use your head next time. You can't beat a game that's been payin' the house for a hundred years like this one has. There are always ways of getting a man you want without making a free show of it."

"Do you approve of that method?"

"You're damn right I do — when there's a reason for it." And for a moment there was a gleam in Peyron's black eyes that was not pleasant to look at.

"*RAPPORT! Allez, rapport!*" The shout of the room corporal broke in on the discussion. Immediately there was a scramble for the door.

Report, like a great many other things in the Legion, was more a method of torment than anything else. Orders were read; men were selected for various duties, and if the sergeant-major happened to feel like it, he delivered a lecture. Now and then some forutnate Legionnaire received a letter, but it was a rare occasion.

Heinrich envied his comrades their stroll into town during the evening, but there was nothing at all that could be done about it. Confinement to barracks also meant scrubbing and mopping continuously. Being a week behind in his drills and instructions, he had little time to meditate on his misfortune.

Because of his sojourn in the cells and his sore feet, Heinrich had been assigned to the squad of *Jeunes soldats* for his ignorance and awkwardness. He really was neither, but that did not matter.

The corporal instructor was there to see that the squad was drilled; six hours a day he did his duty. The dumbest of beasts could not help but have learned under his persistent hammering: *"Rassemblement! Repos! Garde à vous! Vis à droite! . . . à gauche!"* He kept it up until the monotony of the simple maneuvers was maddening.

It was a month before the squad of awkwards was given rifles. Then it was the same thing over: *"L'arme au pied! Présentez l'arme! L'arme sur l'épaule droite!"* until the heavy Lebels moved from ground to shoulder and back again like the parts of some machine.

Heinrich learned the commands. By the simple method of filling his shoes with tallow, he healed the painful blisters on his feet. He became an efficient soldier then, and the corporal instructor weakened to the extent of recommending him for the regular company.

"You'll like it better in the company," Peyron informed him; "except when Le Saigneur takes command. The inspections are stiff, but the drill is not so monotonous."

"What happens when this Le Saigneur is around?"

"The brute; 'double-time' is all he knows. He is the senior sergeant, though, so he doesn't bother us very often."

"The meaner they are, the better they like 'em."

Peyron shrugged and went on with the cleaning of his rifle.

HEINRICH joined his company. The millstones of the Legion ground finer and finer, polished him down to a full-fledged Legionnaire. He was accepted by the men, for any *bleu* who had the nerve to punch a non-com was worth cultivating. For the same reason the non-coms watched every move he made, but somehow he managed to keep out of further trouble.

The three months confinement was up at last. Heinrich prepared for his first visit into the city. The walking-out dress was blue tunic, red breeches and overcoats buttoned on the left. He was very careful to see that everything was exactly in order. The smallest spot was unforgivable in the eyes of the sergeant at the gate.

"Keep your head up and act like you owned the joint," Peyron advised. "That's half of it."

They made it all right and Heinrich felt just a little proud of himself. He had nothing to be ashamed of in the matter of build and appearance, and the uniform of the Legion, though coarse and practical, is not bad to look upon. Like new paint on an old house, it covers a multitude of deficiencies in many of the men who wear it.

Sidi-Bel-Abbes at night differed vastly from the strange half-western, half-eastern city Heinrich had viewed that first day. After his three months in the barracks he felt very much like a small boy who has packed a thousand buckets of water to one small elephant and is about to receive his reward.

The Legion's own band was playing in the Place Sidi Carnot. The streets were filled with Spahis, Turcos, Chasseurs d'Afrique, Sapeurs, Tirailleurs, Zouaves and Legionnaires like himself.

Across the Rue Prudon they came to the brilliant cafes, shops and hotels where Frenchmen, Arabs and Spanish Jews rubbed elbows with only-the-Lord-knew-what in their nightly promenade. It was a spectacle, indeed, but there was still the side show.

"HOW about a drink?" Peyron suggested. "I feel the urge to celebrate."

"Not a bad idea," Heinrich replied, "but I haven't the price."

"I have and I know a place where they serve pretty good stuff. Come on."

The odd little man quit the quarter of bright lights and promenaders. He led the way down a nearby alley and across a dimly-lighted square to a liquor shop called the Café de la Princesse.

"A hell of a name for a dump like this," Heinrich remarked. "She must have been *some* dame."

"She was," Peyron nodded. "I'll tell you about it—the story that one of the men told me."

It was not an impossible place, The Café de la Princesse. The floor was fairly clean. There were benches, chairs and tables about. The bar was quite modern.

There was Algerian wine to be had at a few centimes the bottle — better brands, too, if one could afford them, and the usual assortment of *tord-boyaud*.

A scarlet-coated Spahi got up from a table over against the wall. The two Legionnaires took the place he had vacated.

"That's Bel Kassan, the bird who owns the joint." Peyron pointed to a man standing near the bar. "A decent sort, too. He'll be around before long. If we can get him to stop and talk, he'll set up the drinks."

Heinrich peered through the haze of tobacco smoke and made out a tall, broad-shouldered man of uncertain age standing at one end of the bar. Though he lounged carelessly, and seemed disinterested, it was evident that his keen, dark eyes missed nothing at all that went on about him.

The name, Bel Kassen, was Arabic, and to some extent his sharp, sensitive features were suggestive of that ancient race of nomads. In his dress and mannerisms, however, the proprietor was decidedly western.

"What breed is he?" Heinrich asked. "I thought all Arabs wore those crazy nightgowns."

"He's a mixture," Peyron replied. "I don't know of what. But he isn't pure Arab."

"What about this dame he calls the princess?"

The little Legionnaire sampled his drink, and lit a cigaret.

"The same old story," he laughed. "She ran off with another man—some bird here in Bel Abbes, and they beat it to France."

"So they do that here, too? I thought these fellows treated their women rough?"

"I guess that was the trouble. They say Bel Kassan was really in love with her—married her and all that."

"Which, I suppose, is quite unusual."

"Oh, no; but it was a lot of nonsense as far as the princess was concerned. She was nothing but a Marseilles quim in the first place."

"A good looker, was she?"

"I don't know. That's always a matter of opinion, anyway. She pulled her getaway before we landed here."

"Who was the lucky gentleman? Does Bel Kassan know?"

"The soldier who told me about it seems to think that he does—claimed that he knew the bird himself, but I took that with a lot of salt."

THE proprietor moved away from the bar as they finished the discussion of his marital troubles. He made his way from one table to the next, greeting his patrons. Senegalese, Turcos or native Berber, he spoke to all—impartial. He came at last to the two Legionnaires.

"Bon soir, messieurs," he said.

"Bon soir—Good evening," they answered. Heinrich spoke in English.

The proprietor glanced at him sharply.

"You are Engleesh?"

"American," Heinrich replied, surprised at being addressed in his own tongue. "We both are."

"So? That ees better still. Americans are not so many in Bel-Abbes."

The proprietor pulled up a chair and sat down eying Peyron more closely. He seemed doubtful of the little man's unusual color.

"You are not in thees Legion long, eh?" he asked.

"Three months today," Heinrich nodded.

"So? You have not come to my place before."

"No, this is my first night out."

"Ah, you are the one who punch the corporal. Ees that not so?"

"Yep, I'm the guy—or maybe I ought to say goat."

"Goat? What ees the goat? You are a remarkable fellow. For that you must have a drink—both of you—anything you weesh."

"Make it cognac," Heinrich laughed. "And tell me, where did you learn your English?"

"From my father."

The man shrugged and dismissed the subject as if there was something about it he disliked.

PEYRON, however, found it interesting.

"Your father? Was he English or American?"

"*Zut,* he was neither. He was Portuguese—a *domestique* to a family of English. He learn from them. I learn from them, too, until I go with my mother back to the desert."

"Then your mother was Arab?"

"Yes, Arabian — daughter of Harun Bel Kassan, sheik of the great. . . . But I speak of things that do not interest. Tell me of the Legion. What is your company?"

"The twenty-eighth company of the first regiment," Peyron informed him. "I think it is better known as the company of confusion."

"Ah, the twenty-eighth. Yes, I know; they have not long return from Syria.

"Right; what was left of them. Most of the original company were butchered by the Druse tribesmen."

"Ah, yes, it is always so with the Legion. But tell me, who are your officers?"

"If we've got a captain, I've never heard of him. Lieutenant Jouven seems to be the big chief and Sergeant-major Tellier does all the work."

"Ah, yes. I know them both. They are not so bad as some. What about the sergeant?"

Peyron muttered an oath. "He is the devil, if there ever was one. I don't know his right name. They call him Le Saigneur."

The proprietor nodded slowly, and his eyes narrowed.

"Le Saigneur — Le Saigneur," he repeated. "Yes, I have heard of heem, too."

Something in his expression—in the way he spoke the name caught Heinrich's attention.

"Whatever you heard must have been interesting. I have not yet had the pleasure of meeting this—this butcher, as you call him."

"You might call eet 'interest'." Bel Kassan pushed back his chair and stood up. "With me eet is not so. *Bon soir, messieurs.* I hope you like my leetle café—that you weel come again—often."

"What the devil did he mean?" Heinrich asked, when the proprietor had gone. "What could he have against this blood-thirsty sergeant?"

Peyron could not answer. He only knew that he, too, had detected a sudden change in Bel Kassan's manner.

CHAPTER V

"READY TO MARCH!"

THE twenty-eighth company scrambled out of their bunks as usual the next morning. The shrill blare of bugles was echoing through the corridors. The corporals were shouting: "Get up! *Debout! Debout!*"

Heinrich gulped down his bowl of boiling hot coffee and got into his clothes, reconciled to another day of the monotonous labor and drill. The powers on high, however, had planned something different, as he soon discovered.

"Full packs . . . Ready to march!" The corporal bellowed the next minute. The men looked at each other in astonishment.

"What the devil are we in for now?" Heinrich exclaimed in the Legion jargon.

"Lord only knows!" an old soldier replied. "Probably some fool inspection. There's no telling, though. It may mean that we are going to move."

"Rassemblement! Vis à droite! Dépêchez-vous!"

The air was already blue with orders by the time Heinrich reached the parade ground. He slipped into his place in line.

A voice that resembled a foghorn bellowed. *"Garde à vous!"*

The command could not have come from anyone but Le Saigneur. When he had snapped to attention, Heinrich dared to look at the man whom he had heard decried so rigorously.

For a moment he could only gasp and stare. His blood ran cold, then hot. He could not believe his own eyes.

And then he knew that he could not be mistaken—the thick neck, the fierce, black mustache with the eyebrows to match, the close-set eyes and the hard, cruel mouth. No, he was not mistaken.

Le Saigneur was the man who had occupied the seat across from him in the Toulon-Marseilles express.

"Garde à vous!" roared the sergeant again. Heinrich realized that the command was meant for his special benefit. In his horror, his astonishment, he had dared to lift a hand toward his face.

"Thon de Dieu! What do you—"

The sergeant stopped with his mouth open. For an instant he stared, much as Heinrich had done a few seconds before. His jaw snapped shut and he took a half-dozen quick steps forward. Had they been alone, he would have seized the object of his rage in his two huge paws.

He came on to within a foot of Heinrich and glared into his face, his nostrils wide, his eyes closed to slits.

"Son of a dog!" he spat. "You will stand still before I am through with you! By *le bon Dieu,* yes—still as a corpse—understand?"

HEINRICH understood—only too well. He knew that the recognition had been mutual, and that Le Saigneur would not rest until his dreadful secret was his alone. A corpse . . . Yes, that would be the one sure way. What malicious whim of fate had again brought him under the influence of this inhuman bully?

Le Saigneur strode back to his place in front of the company. He stood there looking over the line of rigid men, fighting to regain his composure. To any but himself the company would have appeared without a flaw. It provided a vent for his anger, however, to find fault. He picked them to pieces unmercifully.

When he felt that he had sufficiently upheld his reputation, he bellowed a command: *"L'arme sur l'epaule—droite!"*

From right shoulder arms to present, to order, and back again, the Lebels snapped as fast as he could bark the orders. For half an hour he kept it up. Not a single man made as much as one false move. Mechanically, Heinrich drilled with the rest, his brain a confusion of conflicting thoughts.

"Colonne par trois—column by threes—*marche!"* came the command at last.

The company swung into the maneuver and the sudden thud of boots on the hard-packed ground broke through the stupor that had come over Heinrich.

Desertion was the one idea of the insane jumble that would not be dispelled. He must manage somehow to escape—to get away from Bel-Abbes

and the clutches of Le Saigneur. To remain would mean death, one way or another, as soon as the sergeant could conveniently arrange it.

INSPECTION followed the drill, the most severe the *bleus* had experienced. It was conducted by Lieutenant Jouven, the sergeant-major and Le Saigneur. There was not a piece of equipment that was not scrutinized almost to the point of absurdity.

To his surprise and relief, Heinrich pulled through without an offense. His three months in confinement had done that much for him, at least. Through it all, however, the one thought remained uppermost in his mind—he must get away before it was too late. He dare not make a botch of it.

More drills, and an inspection by the *medicine major* followed during the afternoon, until even the *anciens*—the veterans—were ready to admit that something unusual was in the air.

"What do you make of it?" Heinrich asked one of them. "Do you think we are going to move?"

"*Mon enfant*—" the old Legionnaire shook his head—"when you have been in this suburb of hell as long as I have, you will learn to take things as they come and think about them afterward. I have seen more nonsense than this over the arrival of a new colonel."

Heinrich felt better. He hoped it was something like that, anyway. He had thought out a plan that he believed would succeed.

Peyron, much to his disgust, had not fared so well during the inspections. He had been negligent to the extent of allowing someone to steal his neckcloth. For this carelessness he was required to remain in barracks until the lost article was restored. In other words—until he could steal one from somebody else.

Heinrich felt sure that the confinement would prove short-lived, for Peyron was as clever a thief as any in the company. The restrictions, however, had not been lifted when the hour arrived for the evening walkout, and he was just a bit glad. Heinrich held a strong liking for the little Legionnaire, but he thought it better to work out his plans alone.

ONCE through the gate, he made his way straight to the Café de la Princesse. Bel Kassan was busy in his tiny office when Heinrich entered, but he came out presently and wished his early patron a pleasant evening. The Legionnaire pulled out a chair and asked him to sit down.

"You are alone thees evening," the proprietor remarked.

"Yep. Peyron is doing a little cleaning-up around the barracks tonight—got caught up on inspection."

"So? Ah well, *c'est la Légion.*"

"Yes, such is the Legion all right. Tell me, Bel Kassan, how can I get out of the damned outfit—out of Bel Abbes, and the whole beastly country?"

"What? So soon?" The proprietor grinned. "What has happened?"

"Listen. I'm going to ask a favor of you—man to man," Heinrich said earnestly. "I've got to get away and I want you to help me. I'm no tramp. I can get my hands on some money if I ever get out of here, and I'll pay you whatever you ask."

Bel Kassan slowly and emphatically shook his head.

"A thousand times I have been ask that same thing. I can not help you. That ees business for the Jews. Be careful, though, they weel take your money, your uniform, and then when you are gone they weel tell the guard and collect the reward when they bring you back."

"I know all that. That's why I came to you. I can't take a chance. I've got to make it."

The proprietor rose to his feet with a shrug. "I am sorry, but there ees nothing I can do. Eef I help you and you are caught, my business ees closed."

"Sit down until I tell you something," Heinrich argued desperately. "I'm no

quitter. If I had a ghost of a show, I'd stick it out, but I haven't. What chance has a man in that outfit with Le Saigneur on his neck?"

Bel Kassan sat down.

"Why ees Le Saigneur angry weeth you, a common soldier? What have you done to heem?"

"I saw him for the first time since I've been here today. And he saw me. I know something about him, the dog, that nobody else knows. And he'll never be satisfied until he kills me."

"You know something about Le Saigneur? What ees eet?"

"He is a murderer and he knows that I know it."

Bel Kassan sat back with disgust.

"Bah, who does not know that? He ees worse than a murderer, but eet makes no difference."

"This was no poor damn soldier. It was a woman—on the train between Toulon and Marseilles."

BEL KASSAN straightened. "What? A woman!"

"Yes, a woman. That's why I'm here, because the fool trainman thought it was me. I was riding in the same compartment."

"Thees woman, what did she look like?"

"I don't know. She was middle aged —medium build—French, I guess. At least they were talking French."

"You do not know what they said?"

"No. I couldn't understand a word of the damn lingo then. He was giving her hell about something; that was all I got out of it. And she was crying."

"You saw heem keel her—you really saw heem?"

"No. I didn't see him actually stick her. I was out in the washroom. But when I got back she was dead and he'd jumped out the window."

"Tell me about eet—everything."

Heinrich told him in detail. He told how he had happened to be on the train in the first place, how he had found the dead woman on the floor of the compartment and how he had escaped.

"That's why I've got to get out of this damn hole!" he added. "If I don't, that devil will kill me as sure as he murdered that woman."

Bel Kassan nodded, his forehead beaded with sweat, his fingers white where they clutched the table.

"I weel help you," he said after a long silence. "But you must go now, so no one weel know you were here. Come back tomorrow night."

"Tomorrow? We may be gone tomorrow. We've had nothing but inspections all day. I've got to go now."

"You can not go now. I weel have to arrange. Thees inspection, what ees it? Where would the company go?"

"How do I know where they are going? They never tell us poor fools anything."

"Eet ees impossible that they go tomorrow. You have not had the hair cut. Neither have they give you the rations —the ball cartridge, am I not right?"

"No, they haven't done any of that, but who knows, maybe they're not going to."

"Always they cut the hair and give the rations. Come tomorrow night and I weel have eet fix. And maybe for favor to me you weel find out where the company ees going, eh?"

"I will if I can, but what do you care where they're going?"

"Oh, eef they not go too far, maybe I send my friend to open small café. Eet ees good business."

"I see. I'll find out if I can, but I don't think there's much chance. Don't go back on me now—tomorrow night, for sure—and I won't forget what you've done for me."

CHAPTER VI

LASH OF LE SAIGNEUR

LONG before daylight the blare of bugles crashed through the barracks of the Twenty-eighth Company.

The shouts of the room corporals added to the din.

Heinrich pulled on his clothes with a sinking sensation in the region of his stomach. Was this a continuation of the drills, inspections and tortures they had been through the day before, or did it mean something else—something worse?

"Full packs. . . . Ready to march!" the corporal bellowed.

Heinrich muttered an oath. He tried to console himself though, with the thought that the same order had been issued the morning previous. Nothing had come of it then. It might be the same now.

The men were in high spirits as they raced down the three flights of stairs to the parade ground. Anything that promised a break in the monotonous routine of barrack life was more than welcome. It made no difference how often their hopes were shattered; they never failed to grasp at the first new rumor.

When the sections were marched off one by one to the barber shop, their joy resembled the suppressed glee of so many youngsters at the burning of a schoolhouse. All except Heinrich. To him it spelled only disaster—the failure of his plans.

Later, with his head clipped like a convict's, he stood with the others and received his rations and ammunition. They were moving. There was no longer any possible doubt of it.

He cursed Bel Kassan from the bottom of his heart. He harbored an unfounded belief that the Arab half-breed had known of the move from the very first. And yet, there was no question of the impression his story had made on the man.

The company was called to the final assembly at last, with full packs, overcoats, ammunition and rifles. The colonel gave them a long-winded lecture to which no one paid the slightest attention. They were marched out through the main gate then, with the band in the lead, playing the Legion's favorite—*Voila du Boudin.*

The band swung off to one side when they reached the edge of town and allowed the company to pass. A kilometer farther on, the command: *"Pas de route*—route step—*Marche!"* echoed along the column. They knew they were in for a hike.

"*NOM DE CHIEN,* the road to Saida!" A Legionnaire swore. "Fifty kilometers, and that Lieutenant Jouven will make us march it without a camp."

"A mere evening walkout," another man laughed. "I have been over this road six times."

"Zut, I helped to build it!" a third declared. "We marched out from Bel-Abbes every morning and back at night. Before it was finished we were marching fourteen hours a day, and working one."

He was an old man, an *ancien,* who might have been a sergeant-major instead of a private had he the strength of mind to keep away from the bottle. He looked very much as if he might be telling the truth; he was that scarred and grizzled. But the soldiers around him had no respect for age.

"La cafard—crazy!" one of them laughed. "Tell us about Napoleon—the time you two got drunk together."

"You don't believe it, eh?" the old man returned. "All right then. We'll sing *Du Bodin.* Come on:

"Tiens, voila du bodin
Tiens, voila du bodin
Tiens, voila du bodin
Pour les Alsaciens, les Suisses, et les Lorraines,
Pour les Belges il n'y en a plus
Car ce sont des tireurs du flanc—"

The rough banter and ribald jokes had not interested Legionnaire Paul Heinrich. Marching at ease with his rifle upside down, Legion fashion, his mind had been occupied with thoughts of his own.

The old marching song, however, coming from the throats of two score

men, seemed to lift him out of his mood. It lightened his load.

What was the use? he asked himself. If fate had decided that he needed another jolt in the wind there was nothing to do but take it. Cursing his luck would not help matters. He was no infant in arms. He could fight if he had to.

Le Saigneur would probably get him in the end, but what of it? If the devil would give him half a chance, he'd make it interesting for him until he did.

"Voila du boudin!" he muttered, and before he realized it, he was humming the tune with the rest.

"THAT'S the stuff!" Peyron declared, trudging along at his side. "You've been grouchy as hell the last couple days. Cheer up, we're going out and get us an Arab."

Heinrich looked down at the little Legionnaire and managed a grin. "Me, grouchy? You're foolish—been worrying about my income tax, that's all."

"That's something to worry about, all right. The income, not the tax. Think of it—a penny a day and a lousy pint of wine."

"Halte!" the lieutenant barked. *"Repos!"*

"I'll be damned!" Peyron exclaimed. "We've been at it fifty minutes already! Here, have a smoke."

For ten minutes the company sprawled in the road. Some smoked; some lay still; a few fumbled with straps and buckles, endeavoring to ease their packs, and others examined their feet.

At the order, *"Rassemblement—en avant!"* they formed ranks again. The march continued.

There was less joking the second hour; the third there was none. The singing, too, became an effort, and then failed entirely.

"Come on you cripples, *L'Empereur de Danmark*—sing it out!" the corporal urged, but he got only a curse for his trouble.

By the fifth halt, twenty kilometers lay behind the sweating, straining soldiers. The pace had begun to tell. Twenty kilometers, however, did not satisfy the lieutenant, riding easily on the back of a prancing, black mare.

"En avant! Step out or by *le bon Dieu* you will march at attention!" he threatened. "I have seen old women who could do better."

The response was an outburst of muttered oaths.

"How are you making it?" Peyron inquired when the complaints had died out.

"Not so bad," Heinrich replied. "It's no worse than the *plut*, anyway."

LE SAIGNEUR dropped along the column then, his practiced eye searching out the weak from the strong, his sharp tongue lashing them on. Heinrich knew without even glancing his way that the sergeant had sized him up and estimated his endurance to the last possible meter.

It grew dark at last. The sudden chill in the air was heaven-sent after the long grind in the burning sun. There was a marked difference in their stride during the hour that followed.

It looked as if they might make it through without a casualty. Human flesh, however, can stand so much and no more. When the eighth halt was called there were three who went down and could not get up.

One of them, a sallow-cheeked young German, had marched in the squad with Heinrich. When he did not rise at the command to assemble, the two Americans tried to help him. Le Saigneur came back to investigate the delay, and gazed on the exhausted man with disgust.

"'Cré nom de Dieu!" he swore. He prodded the soldier with the toe of his boot.

The German groaned, and struggled to his knees. *"Ach, Gott!"* he gasped.

With one huge paw the sergeant jerked him to his feet.

"Take his rifle, *Gran-père,*" he nodded to the grizzled old man in front. "And you, my strong young ox"—he turned to Heinrich— "take his pack."

THE persecution had begun, as Heinrich had known it would, but he did not complain.

"Oui, mon Sergeant."

He saluted, and with the help of one or two others, he got the extra pack on his already aching back.

Tramp . . . tramp . . . tramp. The grind continued.

For a long time the sergeant stayed with the squad, watching it like a wolf trails a herd of cattle. It was the man with the double pack that held his attention, though, and not the one who had collapsed. Heinrich knew this. Somehow he stumbled on.

Le Saigneur went forward, finally, in response to an order from the lieutenant. The squad relaxed. Heinrich's relief was expressed in a groan.

"The son of a goat!" the soldier on his right spoke a word of sympathy. "There's no excuse for overloading a man like that. Here, rest your pack on this."

He handed the muzzle of his gun to Peyron, on the other side. Grasping the stock himself, they brought it up under the pack. Between the two of them they helped Heinrich bear his burden.

Twice during the hour, the sergeant dropped back to see how his victim fared. Each time the support was withdrawn. Not once did he offer a word of encouragement, much less suggest that someone else take the extra load.

Ten hours, and every man dropped where he halted. There was no smoking; no one spoke. When the command came to march, it was several minutes before the combined kicks and oaths of the non-coms started them moving again.

THE once smart appearance, of which the Legion is so proud, was entirely forgotten. They slouched and staggered, backs bent and heads lowered, but on they marched. And Heinrich, his lungs bursting, his body numb, his feet like solid weights of lead, somehow marched with them.

They reached the gates of a town, some time later, and the lieutenant gave the order to march at attention. The city was in darkness and the streets deserted, but that made no difference. The Legion's reputation must be upheld.

"Garde à vous!" Le Saigneur and the corporals repeated the command. Because the men knew instinctively that the end was near, they put forth one last effort. It carried them through the barrack gates at Saida where the final, *"Halte! Formez les faisceaux*—stack arms!" broke in on their dazed senses.

"You came very near making a record, *mon Lieutenant,*" Le Saigneur remarked. "But for some of the *bleus* it would have been easy."

"It would not have been anything to brag about," the lieutenant replied. "Not with the evening cool and bracing like this."

They were passing along the column as they talked. The men nearby could not help hearing what was said.

"Did you get that?" Peyron inquired. "The lousy, low-lived skunk!"

Heinrich had heard, but he was too near exhaustion for the remarks to make any impression. The thought uppermost in his mind was the fact that he had survived. He would never have made it without the aid of his two comrades, but he had kept out of the grasp of Le Saigneur. And the knowledge gave him courage.

CHAPTER VII

SANDS OF DEATH

STIFF and sore, the company was marched to the railroad station early the next morning. It was herded

aboard a train along with a company of Moroccan Tirailleurs.

Heinrich's glance met the sullen, self-satisfied gaze of Le Saigneur as the sergeant strode past his window. He could not help comparing himself with a fat steer on its way to the slaughtering pen. His fear of the man, however, was not what it had been. He even found it interesting to ponder over the method Le Saigneur would finally use to get him.

Puffing and wheezing, as if it were about to burst, a tiny locomotive jerked them out of the station and began a winding ascent through the mountains. All day it climbed, so slow at times that the inclination was to get out and help the decrepit little engine with its load. When the summit was at last conquered, the descent into the valley beyond was as rapid as the climb had been slow.

With brakes screeching and the ancient wooden coaches rocking like a string of canoes, the train dropped down to the great salt marsh at le Kreider. From there it climbed again, up into the barren mountains of Ksour. Rock-strewn and desolate, it seemed impossible that even a Berber tribesman could live there.

From Mecheria the road wound through the mountains to Ain Sefra; then down to Beni Ounif on the edge of the vast Sahara. Two days and one night it had taken to make the journey.

The Legionnaires greeted the order to disembark with shouts of relief. A few minutes march from the station, Lieutenant Jouven gave the order. *"Campez!"* Tents were set up in two straight lines—Tirailleurs on one side and the Legion on the other.

Beni Ounif consisted of the usual collection of one-story, flat-roofed hovels, surrounded by the inevitable stone wall. There was one street that might be termed the main thoroughfare. The rest were narrow, dirty alleys.

It was a town, though, and there were sure to be cafés and wine shops, which was all that interested the soldiers. When the camp had been put in order and the guard posted, those who were free set out to look the place over.

HEINRICH, much to his surprise, was among them. He suspected, though, as he and Peyron passed the guard, that he had been turned loose for the express purpose of getting himself in trouble; and he was determined not to. They selected a small café and took seats near the entrance, to be handy in case there was need for a hasty exit.

"The jumping-off place, I'd call it," Peyron remarked.

"Good Lord, yes," Heinrich agreed. "Imagine fighting over a God-forsaken country like this—desert, barren mountains and flea-bitten Arabs."

Peyron leaned forward. He spoke in an undertone, a precaution entirely unnecessary.

"There's one of 'em who acts like he knew you—over there on your right."

Heinrich waited a moment, then turned and glanced at the bearded, white-robed native his companion had indicated. Instantly he had the feeling that somewhere he had seen the man before. The Arab nodded slightly and gazed questioningly at Peyron.

Heinrich was undecided as to whether he had better answer the man or not. He was curious. Yet he feared the treachery of Le Saigneur. He decided he had better not take any chances.

"What do you make of it?" Peyron asked. "Did you ever see him before?"

"I might have," Heinrich shrugged. "But if I did, I can't say where it was. The devils all look the same to me."

"Me, too, but it seems to me I've seen this one around Bel-Abbes."

"Bel-Abbes! What would he be doing down here then?"

"Search me. That's only a guess, anyway."

Heinrich glanced at the Arab again, and as he did, the man drew a piece of paper from beneath his burnoose and spread it on the table in front of him.

"He's probably got some greasy old *Ouled Nail* he wants to date us up with," Peyron decided. "Come on, let's take a look at the rest of the berg."

Heinrich did not think so. The little man's suggestion to move on gave him the opportunity he wanted, though, and he agreed to go. As he got up, he walked behind the Arab's chair. He stopped to light a cigaret. In heavily penciled letters, scrawled on the piece of paper, he read:

BEL KASSAN KEEPS HIS WORD—PATIENCE—BE CAREFUL.

He looked back as they stepped out into the street. The Arab was touching a match to the bit of paper.

BEL KASSAN—he had misjudged the man after all. The proprietor had really meant to help him, and apparently still did. But what chance was there now—down there on the desert?

That reminded Heinrich of the Arab messenger. How had he gotten to Beni Ounif ahead of the troop train? Why had Bel Kassan bothered to send him? How had the tribesman recognized him?

He wanted to talk it over with Peyron—to tell him of the whole incredulous affair, but knew it would never do. When the little Legionnaire got drunk he talked incessantly—told everything he knew to anyone who would listen. Then, too, there was the warning—be careful. No, he would have to work it out for himself.

Apparently, on this occasion, he had misjudged Le Saigneur also, unless the sergeant's plans had been upset by his remaining sober. At any rate, they wandered up one alley and down another, as long as they could endure the terrible stench. Then the two walked back to the camp, without having encountered a single brawl.

The next night Heinrich visited the same café in anticipation of further advances on the part of the mysterious Arab, but he waited in vain. No one came near him or paid him the slightest attention. On his way back to camp, he stumbled and staggered in his best imitation of a drunk, but that was effort wasted also. He was not molested.

"By *le bon Dieu,* you will wish tomorrow that you'd left that load in Beni Ounif," the guard remarked.

"Tomorrow, hic—why tomorrow?" Heinrich inquired.

"Because we are heading into the desert. Get to your tent, fool, and sleep it off."

Into the desert, Heinrich repeated, and was seized with the desire to laugh. Bel Kassan would have a fine time trailing him around the Sahara. What an amusing time old Dame Fate must be having at his expense.

MORNING proved that the guard had known what he was talking about. Orders were issued to break camp.

A little after daylight the Legion was on the march. The Tirailleurs did not accompany them. Why should they? The desert, the hardships were for the Legionnaires—the foreigners. No one ever complained to the *Ministère de la Guerre* when they sizzled and roasted for months at a time in some desolate, sun-baked outpost. . . . No one even heard about it.

The march from Bel-Abbes to Saida had been strenuous enough, but they had traveled a fairly good road there, and in a climate that was vastly different from the desert. Now, they were in sand ankle deep, with a sun that burned down like the blast from a furnace.

"March, you *salopards,* march!" the lieutenant barked, and all that day the company, sweat-streaked and dirty, tramped south into the Sahara.

They made camp that night at a small oasis, took turns at a double guard, and in the morning continued the march. With feet blistered and shoulders rubbed raw by the heavy packs, the first hour was agony. But there was no quitting now. It was keep going or die.

At last some one sighted another

oasis. Above the half-dozen palms a flag hung limp—the tri-color of France. With eyes that smarted from the sweat of their own brows, the weary men gazed at the bit of cloth and muttered prayers—some to God; some to the devil.

The notes of a bugle call drifted across the intervening mounds of sand. When the dust-covered column reached the gates of the outpost, the garrison was lined up at *présenter l'arme* to receive them. The expressions of joy and relief on their lean, burned faces was pathetic to behold.

The *bleus* of the Twenty-eighth Company learned a few things they had never dreamed of that night from the veterans of the outpost. They witnessed *la cafard*—the Legion madness—first hand, saw what it could do to a man. They listened to a few stories of what tough customers the Arabs could be; heard something of the methods they employed in waging war. Also, they were given a few words of advice.

"Fight to the last man," an old Legionnaire declared. "You might as well, for the Arab takes no prisoners. Save your last bullet for your own worthless brains. It's better that way than dying inch by inch with your guts spilled out, or some other damnable torture."

"How long have you been in this hole?" Heinrich asked.

"Six months. Three here, and three at el Haabj, forty kilometers farther south. Some of you men will be headed that way tomorrow—one company for the two outposts."

"Good Lord, forty kilometers more!"

"What of it?" the *ancien* shrugged his shoulders. "It is just as bad here as there. The desert is the same, no matter where you go. It is the commandant that makes the difference."

IN the morning the first two sections were assembled in full marching order. Le Saigneur was in charge.

It meant but one thing. Heinrich was destined for the outpost at el Haabj from which there would be no escape. There the sergeant would rule with an iron hand, his word undisputable. The lieutenant's discourse on *valeur et discipline,* in conjunction with his farewell and well wishes, was a colossal joke.

Out into the desert they marched again. Le Saigneur, in all his glory, cursed and raved and urged them to a faster pace. His own brute strength, his ability to out-tramp the strongest of them, was the most maddening thing about it.

"En avant! En avant!" he bellowed continually. "You march like old women."

In five hours they had covered the first twenty kilometers. But that did not satisfy Le Saigneur. By the simple method of booting the men who lagged, he drove them the last twenty in four hours and a half.

Heinrich, his jaw set, rivulets of sweat streaming down his face, sighted the oasis of el Haabj with a gasp of relief. He had pulled through again without giving the sergeant an opening.

"There you are," Peyron found the spirit to jest. "There's your future home—a choice little corner of hell!"

"There is something wrong here," the old soldier in the rank ahead declared. "We should have heard *rassemblement* by this time. By *le bon Dieu,* look! There is no flag!"

CHAPTER VIII

WATER—POISONED!

THE Legionnaire was right. The bare flagpole stood out in plain view. Not only was there no flag, but the usual sentries were missing from the parapet. Le Saigneur brought the column to attention. He gave the command, *"Halte!"* and went forward alone.

The gates swung open and a half-dozen frenzied soldiers of the Legion came running down the slope.

"Water! Water!" one of them cried. "*Pour le bon Dieu* give us water!"

"Attention!" Le Saigneur shouted angrily. "What is the matter with you? Are you mad? Why do you ask for water?"

The man nearest the sergeant stopped and saluted.

"*Oui, mon Sergent,* if we are not mad, we are the next thing to it! For two days we have not had any water!"

"Why haven't you had water? Where is your commandant?"

"The commandant is dead, *mon Sergent*—poisoned! Half the garrison is dead! The Arabs came in from the desert three nights ago and poisoned the well. We did not know it until the men began to die!"

"*'Cré nom de Dieu!* And what have you done about it? . . . Nothing?"

"All we could do, *mon Sergent.* An hour after the commandant died we sent a man back, asking for help. Last night we sent another, but if you did not hear from them, then they did not get through."

"This is the first I have heard of it. How many men are still alive?"

"Eighteen, but most of them are in a bad way. If you have water to spare, some of them might be saved."

"There is not a full *bidon* in the whole two sections. But get back to your barracks. I will see what can be done. *Sacré,* you have no guard—nothing! You act like a lot of lunatics!

"En avant—marche!" Le Saigneur shouted, and the astonished column marched in through the gates of the stricken outpost.

MOST of the dead had been buried. The barrack room was in good order, considering the condition of the men who were still on their feet.

The suffering of the others was too pitiable to be overlooked by even the calloused Le Saigneur. He ordered an earthen jug brought from the cook house, and the contents of the *bidons* emptied into it. There was enough water for about one good drink apiece. He assigned a corporal to the task of doling it out to them.

"It has been two days since you first discovered the poison," Le Saigneur addressed the soldier who had met them outside the gate, "nearly three since the Arabs were through here. Has any one tasted the water since?"

"Hardly, *mon Sergent,* not after watching half the men die from it."

"That is no reason. You can not live here without water. Any well will clear itself in time. Is there no animal of any kind in the post?"

"There was an ass which was used to carry the jugs, but it died, also."

"Then we will have to select a two-legged one from among the living, and try it on him. If the poison has not passed off, there is nothing to do but abandon the place."

"You might ask for a volunteer, *mon Sergent,* but I would rather die of thirst myself."

The sergeant frowned at the man with disapproval. Then his eyes narrowed and he roared for attention.

"It has been three days since the water was poisoned," he announced, as a preparation for the demand that was to follow. "By this time the well should have cleared itself. Who will volunteer to take the first drink?"

No one replied. He strode up and down, glaring at first one and then the other as if he expected his ugly frown to frighten them into it. His glance met Heinrich's. His small, black eyes narrowed still more.

"Come! Somebody speak up," he snapped, "or I will name the man myself."

"The yellow hound!" Peyron muttered beneath his breath. "Why doesn't *he* drink it?"

The remark was lost on Heinrich. He was thinking fast. He had not made a study of that cruel face for nothing. He knew only too well that if Le Saigneur named any one it would be himself. Why not beat him to it?

"A fine collection of cowards!" The sergeant gave a snort of disgust. "All right then, if you would rather have it that way, I will—"

HE did not finish. His mouth fell open and he stared. Heinrich had stepped forward, his fingers touching his cap.

"You—you volunteer, do you?" Le Saigneur said at last.

"*Oui, mon Sergent,*" Heinrich answered. "I will try the water."

"Good. Go down and get a fresh jugful. Bring it up here before you drink, though I want to see you do it."

Heinrich was amused at the sergeant's confusion. He took one of the jugs and went down the slope to the well. He let the jug sink to the very bottom, to be sure of getting the purest. He pulled it up and took a mouthful to sample it. It tasted as if it might be a solution of arsenic, alkali and quicklime. Heinrich spat it out with the feeling that Le Saigneur was going to win the bout after all.

"What the hell?" he asked himself. "What's happened to the old backbone?" And as he trudged back up the hill to the fort, he whistled the Legion's favorite to screw up his courage.

In the barrack room, he set the jug down in front of Le Saigneur. He dipped into it with his drinking mug.

"Here's to death, *mon Sergent,*" he toasted. "If I happen to meet up with the devil, I'll tell him you are not far behind."

The sergeant's face clouded angrily. His huge fists opened and closed. Nothing would have pleased him more than to have seized the offending Legionnaire by the throat. But he did not dare. There was too much at stake.

He watched him swallow the cup of water, hoping that it would kill him. At the same time he was afraid that it might.

Heinrich put down the cup and touched a match to a cigaret. Ten minutes later, he was still smoking, and a half-hour after that he was convinced that fate was still playing tricks on him. He had felt much worse after a single drink of Algerian rotgut.

Some of the others drank from the jug, then, a bit sheepishly. Le Saigneur worked off his confused wrath on the men who were supposed to have been holding the outpost.

It seemed impossible that the tribesmen, after their successful poisoning of the well, had not returned and wiped the little garrison off the face of the desert, and he told them so in some very terse words. He restored el Haabj to its former routine in very short order.

A week was spent in building a cistern within the walls, to guard against any such calamity in the future. Then the sergeant set himself to the task of locating the tribe that had committed the cowardly outrage.

He made no move to send the men they had relieved back to their company. They grumbled and threatened. One of the corporals dared to mention the matter, but nothing came of it.

"THERE is talk of a grand *promenade,*" Peyron announced toward the end of the second week. "I've half a notion to join them."

"Desert from here!" Heinrich exclaimed. "Don't be a fool! Where would you go? It is a thousand miles to the nearest port."

"Who gives a damn about a port? All they have got to worry about is getting out of French territory."

"And that means a thousand mile hike across this hellish desert. You couldn't make it with anything less than a caravan."

"You're off on your geography," Peyron argued. "It is less than four hundred miles to the Spanish border—due west. One of the *anciens* claims he has been over the ground and knows the way."

"That's ten days of damn tough travel. What about food and water?"

"We can steal the grub from the post.

And this *ancien* claims he knows the water holes."

Heinrich shook his head.

"No thanks; not for me. I can stay right here and get bumped off without going to all that trouble."

"Oh, I'm not starting out tonight, or anything like that," the little man laughed.

"Don't. There's going to be some fighting around here one of these days. It would be a shame to miss it."

"Fighting! *Zut,* I don't believe there is an Arab this side of hell. I know one thing, though, if something doesn't happen soon I'll go *cafard* and start a war of my own."

CHAPTER IX

THE BUTCHER STRIKES

PEYRON was saved the trouble. A scouting party brought word of a tribe encamped at a small oasis off to the east. Le Saigneur immediately decided to investigate. He gave orders for the first section to hold itself ready to march. At one o'clock in the morning they started off across the desert.

"Sans cadence!" was the order of march. There would be no talking or smoking.

Marching in the cool of the morning without their heavy packs, the Legionnaires made good time. By daylight they had covered twenty kilometers. A few minutes later they came out on a rise in full view of the oasis. The Arabs were up and moving about the camp, but it was quite evident that they had been surprised.

Le Saigneur did not mince matters.

"Bayonnette au cannon—fix bayonets" he barked.

He marched the section straight up to the tent occupied by the chief of the tribe. The sheik, a one-eyed, toothless old warrior, came out to inquire what it was all about.

"Parlez-vous francais—do you speak French?" Le Saigneur demanded, his tone as hostile as his actions.

The old sheik glared at him a moment with his one good eye, then spoke to a man standing in the entrance to the tent. The tribesman disappeared, to return shortly with the man who was to interpret for them.

Heinrich took one look at the fellow, and all but dropped his rifle. It was the Arab who had displayed the scrap of paper in the café at Beni Ounif. Peyron muttered an astonished oath. He had recognized him also.

Le Saigneur asked where the tribe had come from and how long they had been there. The Arab answered his question, but the sergeant was not satisfied. The scouting party had made a different report, and he knew something about the habits of these wandering tribes himself.

"You lie!" he declared. "You came from the west, not the south, and you have not been here more than a week."

THE chieftain listened to his interpreter, his anger mounting with every word. The tribesmen gathered about him showed plainly that they shared his feelings.

"If you already know so much, why do you bother to ask?" the interpreter translated the old Arab's retort. "You have insulted the name of Azza Ben Kader."

"That means nothing to me," Le Saigneur snapped. "I asked him a question in the name of France. If he does not answer in another minute, you will have a carcass to feed the hyenas."

Ben Kader heard the translation of this ultimatum and his single eye blazed murder. He opened his mouth to shout an order to the tribe, but he was a second too late. With one deft move the sergeant jerked out his automatic and covered the group.

"Now, by *le bon Dieu!*" he swore. "Who gave the order to poison the well at el Haabj? Who did it? A man for every minute I wait! Tell them that,

you educated dog, and tell them I mean it!"

The interpreter spoke. A look of horror swept over the line of faces before the furious Le Saigneur.

"Speak!" he shouted, "or the first one goes!"

"They know nothing of the well at el Haabj," the interpreter said firmly. "You are making a mistake."

"The Arab never lived who could tell the truth," the sergeant returned with contempt.

His automatic spat a streak of flame.

Aghast, the Legionnaires watched the first of the group pitch forward. They knew now where the sergeant had got his name—the bleeder—the butcher.

A similar scene, more dreadful because the victim had been a helpless woman, flashed through Heinrich's brain. His fingers groped for the trigger of his rifle.

"Speak, you swine!" Le Saigneur aimed at the next. "Speak!"

The Arab lifted his two arms and muttered a prayer to Allah.

Again the gun barked. A shudder went down the line of appalled Legionnaires.

"Nom de Dieu!" someone muttered angrily. "The butcher! The murderer!"

Another shot roared out and they looked for the third victim to slump down beside the others. But he did not, and then they realized that Le Saigneur had not fired—that the third shot had come from within the tent.

"*SACRÉ!*" the sergeant cursed. He staggered back, a raw, red gash across his cheek.

"Ready—fire!" he roared.

The response was feeble. There were few in the section who would have given it a second thought had the bullet grooved the sergeant's brain.

"Fire! Fire!" he bellowed. "With the bayonet—charge!" And with his own gun, he shot down the aged sheik and the interpreter.

Heinrich saw the Arab from Beni Ounif sink to the ground. As the charge swept over, he stopped to peer down at him.

"Bel Kassan keeps his word—" the tribesman gasped. Then his distorted features relaxed and he was still.

Heinrich shook the lifeless form in desperation. He felt somehow that he had lost a friend. What had the Arab meant? What was his secret?

He was still standing there, stupidly gazing at the man when Le Saigneur returned. It had been an easy matter to rout the tribe. They had fled to the dunes without firing a dozen shots.

"Son of a dog!" the sergeant exclaimed. "Can you not wait until a man is cold before you rob him?"

Heinrich looked up, astonished at first, then incensed. He had heard of the practice of robbing the dead, but the idea had been too repulsive for him to give it a second thought.

It struck him that Le Saigneur did not seem particularly wrought up. He wondered if it would not be better to let him think as he did. He swallowed his disgust and did his best to look guilty.

Still glaring at him, the sergeant gave a blast on his whistle.

"Rassemblement!" he shouted.

When the section had formed, he marched them out of the oasis and back the way they had come. It was evident that he was very well pleased with himself.

The blind egotism of the man had made it possible for Heinrich to squeeze through a tight situation. On the long, hot march to el Haabj, he thought of little but the dead Arab and the repetition of the mysterious message.

THE men of the former garrison listened to an account of the assault that night with profound disgust.

"Azza Ben Kader had nothing to do with that poisoning," one of them declared. "It was the work of some Berber gang."

"I don't doubt that," Peyron spoke, "but what did the fool want to lie for?"

"Lord only knows. He might have had some little scheme up his sleeve. Then again he might have figured it was just none of Le Saigneur's damned business."

"Then he did some expensive figuring," someone remarked.

"Don't be too sure it won't cost us something too," the old Legionnaire said tersely. "Ben Kader has been a friend of Sheik Harun Bel Kassan for thirty years. If you know anything about the desert, you know Bel Kassan is no man to fool with."

Heinrich, occupied with the endless task of cleaning his equipment, was seated on a bunk nearby. He dropped a half-polished cartridge case and came to his feet.

"Harun Bel Kassan!" he exclaimed aloud.

The men turned and looked at him, amused and surprised.

"Friend of yours, is he?" the old Legionnaire inquired.

Heinrich covered his confusion by picking up the fallen case.

"No," he returned, "I was just thinking I had heard that name before—in Bel-Abbes."

"You probably did," the soldier laughed. "From what I have heard, Bel Kassan has as many sons wandering around North Africa as a dog has fleas."

Heinrich conceded that this was probably true. He went on with his cleaning. In his own mind, though, he was thinking of only one—a grandson, according to the man's own story—the proprietor of the *Café de la Princesse.*

If Ben Kader had been a friend of the Sheik Harun Bel Kassan, and the Arab messenger a friend of the café owner, it was certainly within reason to connect the four of them.

But suppose he *was* right, Heinrich asked himself—what of it? What could that possibly have to do with a fool Legionnaire who had merely wanted to desert?

CHAPTER X

DESERT SLAUGHTER

HE had plenty of time to ponder over it all during the week that followed. Le Saigneur appeared satisfied to remain within the four walls of the post.

The men were forced to lie about on their cots in the sweltering barrack room. There was no stokehold in any ship afloat that could equal the heat beneath that flat mud roof. The stench of naked sweating bodies was there twofold. Day in and day out it was too hot to smoke, to talk or even quarrel.

Then suddenly one morning Harun Bel Kassan arrived—to avenge the death of his friend, as the old Legionnaire had said he would.

"Aux armes! Aux armes!" the sentries yelled from the parapet.

There was no confusion in the barracks, though the alarm had come at the coolest hour in the twenty-four when every man there was deep in sleep. In a few minutes they had joined the sentries along the wall, half-clad and pounding their heads to clear their senses. But every man bore his rifle and belt of ammunition.

"Lord! Look at them!" Peyron exclaimed. "They are half-way up the slope."

Heinrich peered through the gray light of morning. And his heart stood still. The slope in the direction of the oasis was a solid mass of shouting, struggling humanity. They were coming on camelback, horseback and afoot—hundreds of them.

"Fire! Fire!" Le Saigneur gave the command.

With rifles and machine-guns, the Legionnaires poured a stream of lead into the advancing tribesmen. Heinrich, working like a cog in some machine,

barely conscious of what he was doing, fired with the rest.

The slaughter was terrible. The machine-guns cut into the mass formation with an accuracy that was appalling. Yet the wave continued to advance. A hundred yards from the wall it seemed to waver, but it was only that the Arabs, too, had begun to fire. Their bullets spattered against the parapet and whistled over it. All too frequently one found its mark.

Heinrich saw the man on his right go down with a hole in his forehead. The spatter of blood made him sick at his stomach. He fired, loaded and fired again.

Then to his horror a brown, bearded face appeared suddenly in front of him. He thrust his bayonet through the Arab's throat, jerked it clear. The expression on the tribesman's ugly contenance made him shudder, but it was no time then for any thought of mercy.

The Arabs were struggling to gain the wall.

"GRENADES! Grenades!" The bellow of Le Saigneur rang clear above the storm of battle. "Let the swine have it! Blow them to hell!"

The Legionnaires turned loose with the bombs. They released the pins and held the deadly missiles until they all but went off in their hands.

Still the screaming, hate-spitting horde came on. The ground outside the wall was strewn with their dead, but those who lived only yelled the louder and fought the harder. The wall was lined with them.

"With the bayonet! Rip them open!" an old corporal cried in desperation. "*'Cré nom de Dieu,* they will butcher us all!"

The morale of the Legionnaires was marvelous. *Bleus* and veterans, shoulder to shoulder, they stabbed with the long, slender blades, and battered heads with their gun-butts. Their efforts, however, were of no avail. The sheer press of the struggling mob below shoved the foremost tribesmen up and over the wall.

And then, at the moment when it was needed most, the rat-tat-tat-tat of the machine-gun above the gate suddenly ceased.

"The gun! The gun! *En avant, mes salopards!*" the familiar voice sang out.

Heinrich found himself on the heels of Le Saigneur, racing across the parade ground toward the gate. A little band of Legionnaires was still fighting there, with backs to the wall, but the tribesmen were dropping down on them at a rate that was maddening.

They closed with the group of Arabs who were fighting to open the gate. The sergeant, fired with the mania to kill, was in his glory. He emptied his automatic, then seized a discarded rifle and swung it by the muzzle.

"Allez la Légion!" he roared. "Brain the devils! Kill them!"

Heinrich was battling at his side. He felt a slug of lead rip through his sleeve, downed the cursing Arab who had fired it with a bullet through his middle. Another hurled a knife and he bashed the man's skull with his gun butt. He was fighting in a way he had never dreamed was possible.

Peyron, who had remained with him through it all, tripped over the body of a dead Legionnaire and sprawled at his feet. A tribesman aimed a kick at the little man's head. Heinrich stopped him with a slash of the bayonet.

"I'll remember that," Peyron tried to thank him, but the incident to Heinrich was already closed. They had cleared a path to the gate. Le Saigneur was cleaving a way up the stairs to the captured machine-gun.

The strength of the man was tremendous—inhuman. He laughed when he killed. When a tribesman escaped him, he bellowed like a bull. At the top of the stairs, he turned and shouted for the others to follow. Then his blazing eyes lit on Heinrich. For an instant he stared, his lips parted in an evil grin.

"Sapristi, and still you live!" he

swore. "Then you shall help take that gun. *En Avant!*"

THE half-dozen Arabs working frantically at the machine gun became suddenly aware of them. Two of them fired and one hurled a knife. Heinrich dodged the hissing blade and sprang forward. Le Saigneur spat an oath as one of the bullets laid bare his ribs, but he was not a foot behind.

Together they tore into the Arabs—one because of the twist in his brain that had made him a killer, the other because there was no alternative.

Twice Heinrich thrust home his bayonet and jerked it out dripping with blood. A bullet burned through the flesh of his arm; a knife grazed his neck. He was wounded in a dozen places, but it never occurred to him to quit. He was fighting for his life, one enemy at his elbow and the other before him.

Suddenly there were only the Arabs. The mighty Le Saigneur was down.

Still Heinrich did not quit. He swung the steel-shod gun-butt with all his strength and knocked the next man clear of the wall. There were two left even then, but he scarcely saw them. Blinded with sweat and blood, he fought on, cutting and slashing like a man gone berserk. At last he realized that the way ahead was clear.

He staggered to he coveted machine gun, swung it around and pressed the trigger. The weapon sputtered—stopped—barked again, then settled down to a steady roar. He had won.

Le Saigneur came forward then, crawling on his hands and knees, and took the gun himself. It made no difference to Heinrich. The brute could have it. Had he felt otherwise, though, he would not have hesitated to shove him aside. Somehow he no longer feared the man. He had fought beside him and seen him beaten. The sergeant had the brain of a devil, but his body was flesh and bone.

The Legionnaires who had followed them, to guard against an attack from the rear, turned back to assist the little band at the gate. When the last man had disappeared down the stairs, Le Saigneur trained the gun along the top of the wall.

The result was terrible. A score of Arabs paid the penalty of their victory before they realized what was happening. The rat-tat-tat-tat of another gun, at the opposite angle of the parapet, joined that of the sergeant's. The force of the attack seemed to lessen.

"NOW! Now! They are whipped! Drive them out!" Le Saigneur shouted above the roar of his weapon.

Somehow the handful of Legionnaires who had survived found the strength to respond. One after another they gained the different points of vantage until the tribesmen broke and made a dash to escape the inferno they had entered. With the machine-guns blazing away from the parapets, they found this impossible, and in a very short time there was not one of them left alive inside the post.

Le Saigneur ordered the men up on the walls then. He made them shout and sing their war cries until the Arabs had withdrawn to the shelter of the oasis. It was a demonstration of victory, intended to impress the defeated tribe, but there was not a Legionnaire who did not know at heart that they would never withstand another attack.

A half-dozen of the best shots were set to sniping. Others attended the wounded. The dead were dumped over the walls and the fort put in order again. Then their pitiful state was even more apparent.

Le Saigneur, his wounds cared for, paced back and forth, cursing and watching the oasis through his binoculars. The fact that the Arabs did not move on was evidence that they had not given up. At last he came to a desperate decision. He gave orders to prepare to abandon the outpost.

Peyron, his head swathed in bandages

and his arm in a sling, muttered an angry protest.

"It is the only wise move the pig has made," a scarred old veteran silenced him. "If we can slip out tonight without being seen, there is a chance of us making it back to the next outpost. If we stay here, we will never live through another day."

"But the wounded?"

"Those who are able to stand will march as far as they can. The others —*c'est la Légion.*"

The arms and ammunition that could not be carried were hidden beneath the floor of the barrack room. That afternoon the *bidons* were filled with water from the cistern and a day's rations issued to those who wanted it. There was nothing to do then but continue the sniping and pray for darkness.

It came at last. Le Saigneur ordered the men on the wall to cease firing. Flares were set that would burn for some time.

The Butcher strode into the barrack room for a last look at the hopelessly wounded. It was not the abandoning them that troubled him. As it was, there were some who had declared themselves fit to march whom he knew would only cause a delay. Le Saigneur was thinking of the loaded rifles that had been given to each one and the fact that eventually they would fall into the hands of the tribesmen.

There was nothing to be done about it, however, and he walked out again with a cold, unemotional, *"Bon chance* —good luck."

The curses and groans that followed him, bothered him not at all.

CHAPTER XI

BEL KASSAN KEEPS HIS WORD

SILENT and grim, not more than one full section of them now, the Legionnaires slipped over the wall at the rear of the fort and crept away into the desert. Le Saigneur, for a while, refrained from his usual bellowing.

But it was not for long. He became impatient with the pace they had fallen into. He began urging them to increase their speed.

He knew that some of the wounded could not possibly keep it up, but that did not matter. A few of the stronger tried to help them, but the man does not live who can follow a camel trail very far with a hundred and seventy-five pounds on his back.

The first to give up was a young Italian with a hole through his lung. His dying gasp was an oath that must have tempted Le Saigneur to shoot him even then. An ugly, vicious little rat from the Bordeaux docks was the next to quit. He too breathed his last with a curse on his lips.

Heinrich, burning with fever, every step a stab of pain, heard them vaguely and drove himself the harder. Others dropped out as the hours dragged on, so many he lost track of them. Peyron, he knew, was still with them, for he could hear his muttered oaths.

"Halte! Garde à vous!" the command broke in on his benumbed senses some time near morning. He found himself standing motionless with the others, wondering what the sergeant could be thinking of.

"Sacré, the Arabs!" some one groaned. Then Heinrich heard the muffled thud of hoofs.

"Down! Down!" Le Saigneur shouted desperately. "Form square!"

Staggering and stumbling, the exhausted Legionnaires somehow formed the square. They knelt awaiting the end.

The fight at el Haabj and the long, terrible march had been for nothing after all. They would die now, one at a time, as the old sheik and his tribesmen had met their death at the oasis. The Legion never surrenders.

A RIFLE spoke, off in the darkness, and the dust rose in a tiny cloud in front of them. Another report came

from the opposite direction and then another. They were surrounded.

"Sights at one hundred meters!" the sergeant ordered. "Fire!"

"Yeh, fire—fire!" Peyron shrieked insanely. "At what?"

"Shut up, fool!" Heinrich silenced him. "You'll get a slug in the back. Shoot at the moon."

"In the back—yes! If he'd only give it to me in the brain, I'd welcome it!"

"Don't worry, you'll get it before long—just as soon as it's daylight."

But Heinrich was wrong. The shots were few and badly aimed.

When the first streaks of dawn enabled them to see, they beheld a lone Arab on horseback, a piece of white rag tied to the muzzle of his rifle.

Another horseman joined the first, from behind a nearby dune. Together they rode straight toward the astonished Legionnaires.

"Keep the swine covered," the sergeant warned. "If they make one queer move, shoot them down."

Heinrich heard. He watched breathlessly as the two men approached. Something about one of them drew his attention. His build, his carriage was strangely familiar. Then he choked back a cry of astonishment. It was Bel Kassan—not the old sheik, but the proprietor of the *Café de la Princesse.*

A startled oath broke from Le Saigneur a moment after, and the Arab halfbreed slowly nodded his head.

"Oui, Monsieur Le Saigneur—the bleeder, the butcher, the killer of old men—and women," he said with scorn. "It is I, Bel Kassan."

THE sergeant's mottled face went black with rage. His immense fist gripped his automatic until the knuckles turned white.

"You lie, you mongrel dog!" he spat. "You lie!"

The Arab shook his head. "I repeat, you are a killer of women—my woman. I was too smart for you, Le Saigneur. She left me, yes. But she did not get my money. Was that why you murdered her?"

"You lie! You lie!" the sergeant screamed. "You have been listening to that fool there. I should have killed him the first day I saw him."

He pointed a blunt, crooked finger at the dumfounded Heinrich.

Bel Kassan alone seemed calm and rational.

"It would not have mattered whether you killed this man or not," he said "Some day I should have learned the truth and the end would have been the same. My business, now, is not with these soldiers. It is with you. If you, my brave butcher are willing to give yourself up, they will be allowed to go on their way unharmed."

The proposal brought a change in Le Saigneur that no one there had ever seen before. He scoffed, then he tried to bluff. But the conflict that went on within his stupid, plodding brain was as easily read as the page of an open book. Beneath it all he was afraid.

He glanced at the little band of men he had bullied and abused so long. In every face he saw contempt and hatred. They had always hated him. He had driven them just the same—cattle, spineless and dumb. His opinion of them was not changed even now. The thought gave him courage.

"Speak up!" Bel Kassan snapped. "Will you come, or must I take you?"

"Take me?" Le Saigneur tried hard to scoff. "No dog of an Arab that ever lived could take me, or any other soldier of the Legion. We will fight to the finish."

BEL KASSAN turned to the men. "I mean what I said," he spoke to them alone. "If you wish to stand by that swine, it is up to you. If not, I will take him and you can go your way."

"We will fight it out," a grim, old veteran answered. "He's a swine, a devil, and worse, but he's a Legionnaire." And no matter what the others thought, not one protested the decision.

The Arab shrugged, and then his glance rested on Heinrich.

"What weel you do?" he asked in English.

Heinrich shook his head.

"I'll stick with the rest."

"They are better men, each one of them, than you could ever be," was the Arab's final thrust at Le Saigneur. Wheeling his horse, he started back the way he had come.

But the horse had taken only a step or two when Bel Kassan jerked it suddenly to one side. The roar of Le Saigneur's automatic came a split-second late. In defiance of all honor, principle, or regard for the flag of truce, he had deliberately fired at the retreating back.

The Arab, however, had once again proven too smart for him. He had been certain of what even the Legionnaires would have doubted. And he had saved himself by that sudden move.

Heinrich, in an instant, swung his rifle from the Arabs to Le Saigneur. With all the utter contempt and disgust one man could feel for another, his fingers groped for the trigger. And then he realized that not only his, but every rifle there was turned on the sergeant.

Le Saigneur glanced at the ring of angry faces. The men, who a moment before would have stayed with him to the end, were ready now to shoot him down.

He sneered, then he laughed, and the next second the automatic roared again. With his own hands he had blown off the top of his head.

The impatient snort of one of the horses brought the men to their senses. Bel Kassan came forward to gaze on the fallen sergeant.

"The butcher—a murderer of women," he said. "He died too easily. He should have been made to suffer."

"That makes us one less now," the old veteran declared. "Bring on your mangy tribe, Bel Kassan, and let us get this thing over with."

Bel Kassan shook his head.

"Too many men have died already on account of that beast. My grandfather's quarrel is not mine. I wanted only him."

"Then you mean there will be no fight?" the soldier inquired incredulously. "We are to continue on to the fort?"

"If you wish to, but I have given my word to one man here that I would help him across the border. If anyone else wants to join the *promenade,* he is welcome."

Peyron shot a suspicious glance at Heinrich.

Heinrich nodded. "Yes, I'm the one. My reason for quitting has recently removed itself, but I am going just the same."

"Then I'll go too," the little man declared. "Bel Kassan, there's two of us."

There were several more before it was settled. Only the old veteran, a corporal, and two others preferred to press on toward the outpost. Even they must have doubted the wisdom of their decision when they saw their comrades headed toward the west, a guide to show them the way and camels to pack their provisions.

IT was a long journey and difficult, but some days later the Arab guide held out his arms, north and south, and they knew they had made it. They were in Spanish territory and it was not far to the valley, Rio de Oro, and the coast.

"Shake on it, Heinrich." Peyron put out a worn, bony hand. "I guess it just wasn't our time."

"I guess not," a thin, blond-bearded man agreed. "But don't ever call me that name again. MacGarger is my name—Don MacCarger, and I'm just back from hell."

THE END

Complete Tropic Adventure Novel

BOBADA TRAILS

By HARRY F. OLMSTEAD

A half-breed leech of the River of Death paced the trek to long-lost treasure. But demon arms of the reeking jungle barred the path, to snare El Bruto's prey.

TALL, broad, silent, with a grim mouth that seldom smiled, eyes soft-lashed like a woman's . . . that was Jord Cavender.

Having business with him would have led you to a dingy shack lost in a forest of skeleton towers that dot the Commanche field. There he lived and there he earned the salary that Texas Consolidated was reputed to pay him. That salary was only reputed, you understand, for if this tool-pusher of parts was paid money for his labor the "roughnecks" never saw the color of it.

A lone wolf, this Cavender, by choice. Men were inclined to like him, but found it impossible to chisel through his armor of reserve. And this was exactly as he desired it.

He worked with an intensity that left him energy for naught else. When he rested he asked only to be left alone with his inhibition—the insistent urge that harried him, the silent reminder that lay like a living coal of fire against his great heart. He never played.

At Ranger, at Burkburnett, in far-flung Texas fields where the mad race for black gold bore down, men knew this pusher. They respected him, envied him; yes, and feared him, if the truth be known.

Because he had all of their virtues and few of their vices; because he grinned even as he warped his huge hands into bulging fists when a fight loomed, they christened him "Angel." Thus was he known—Angel Cavender, a man who thought too well of himself to mix with his fellows.

How little they understood him. In their splendid ignorance of the man and the driving force that chained him to his work year after year, they laughed at his serious mein, at his refusal to participate in their wild pleasures in the hell-spawned resorts that mushroom the oil fields. But most of all they condemned his miserliness, his refusal to spend.

And their merriment knew no bounds when this stalwart threw over his job to go to Corpus Christie. Word had leaked out that the Angel spent his entire roll to purchase a decrepit power schooner in which to sail on some fool's errand in tropic seas. . . .

WORD winged its way to Jord Cavender over humming wires that his bid for the *Terrapin* was high. The knowledge lit his features in a fleeting smile. For just an instant it hovered there; then it was gone, leaving him wan, troubled, in the grip of doubt.

For moments he stood irresolute, organizing his faculties, reaching for inner strength to sustain him. Years of strict mental discipline were not to be denied. And again he smiled, filled his lungs. From deep in his chest came a boyish laugh, gay, untrammeled; then the deep voice that made men listen. . . .

"Come, let's get ready, mother," he called, eyes focused upon a dingy corner where naught but emptiness reigned. "I've bought the ship and it's taken every cent I have. We're broke and it takes my wind to know where the money's coming from to make the trip. But don't you worry a bit . . . I'll get it somewhere."

There was suspicion of moisture in his soft eyes. He lit a cigaret, peered through wreathing smoke at the vista of years that were gone.

Indelibly his brain portrayed that scene of long ago . . . his dying mother broken-hearted through loss of a father he could scarce remember; she was clutching his slender shoulders with pitifully wasted hands, exacting his promise to attempt the impossible.

". . . and when I'm gone, Jordie boy, have them cremate me. Then take a part of me, just a wee part of my dust, and go into the tropics. I will lead you to your father. I have always believed him alive, though our friends have laughed at my hope, scoffed at my faith.

"If you find him alive, give him my dust and a wife's undying love. If he is dead, find his resting place and lay me there that I may be always near him. Promise me you'll do that, Jordie."

And the boy, biting deep into trembling lips, gave answer: "I'll do it, mother dear. I'll find him or . . . or die trying!"

And now in his fancy, Jord Cavender heard again her low laugh, her sob of pride, heard her low voiced reply.

"That's the Cavender talking in you, son. Your father was both a stubborn and honest man and you wouldn't be his son if you didn't see this through. Remember these things. You are seeking Tom Cavender, last heard of at Gracias à Dios, Nicaragua. He was searching for the River of Death and the caves of Bobada where the treasure of Mondragon is buried. Repeat it, Jordie."

Over and over again he had said it. By the very persistence of the repetition the words had been emblazoned upon the brain of Jord Cavender, the boy. And those words had become an unceasing torment to Angel Cavender, the man.

He shook himself as the vision faded, smiled savagely as he picked up and fondled a tiny glazed urn; fetish—all that remained of the mother who had borne him. And in that instant he was strengthened, renewed, master of himself.

"You've waited a long time for me, mother," he breathed, "but we're on our way now. We're going to Bobada—you and me. Sure we're broke, but I'll dig up the money. . . ."

AND he did! Hardly had he set foot in Corpus Christie, no sooner was he the registered owner of the *Terrapin,* than he was approached by a business man with a luring proposition. He was short, fat, suave, Manuel De Lugo by name and the confidential agent of a Nicaraguan revolutionary *junta.*

Briefly he stated his case. He received a swift answer from a man used to mak-

ing quick decisions. And he paid over enough money to see Jord Cavender through nicely, with plenty more to come.

By way of showing that he was appreciative, he volunteered to pick up a crew for the inexperienced skipper—a crew of hand-picked men admirably suited to the needs of the hour. Big-hearted! And the Angel fell.

Is it any wonder that the big pusher looked upon the money, the opportunity, as a good omen, as a beneficence of a kindly providence? Is it surprising that this stranger in a strange land should succumb to the spell of the amiable Latin?

While the Nicaraguan wined and dined his guest, troops of sweating brown men toiled in the hold of the *Terrapin*. From heaving lighters went lumber, nails and other innocent things, but only as a cover for ten thousand bright Mausers and a million rounds of seven milimeter cartridges.

The risk, the peril of gun running, meant nothing to Jord Cavender.

Two things mattered and those alone. Once at Prinzapolka, his contraband safely unloaded, he would be heeled to equip a crew of fighters, men who would relish a swift dash to the Rio Muerte for a matching of forces with the treasure-guarding beast that was reputed to toy with the lives of men. Then again, the terminus of his present venture would leave him but a short way from the sinister River of Death.

Truly the opportunity was a godsend. As for peril, the whole thing was a great gamble and Jord Cavender suddenly knew himself for a gambler. Had he known that De Lugo was next highest bidder for the *Terrapin*, he might have been more wary; perhaps not. Certainly he cast off his one and only warning as nonchalantly as one flicks the ash from a cigaret.

A sea dog, to the water born, cautioned him against the ancient vessel with engines of junk, sticks pithy with rot, decayed sheets. In snarling idioms of the sea he blistered Shark Donlin, the new mate, and the shifty-eyed crew. With a knowing wink at the battened hatches, he hinted at fleet cutters that clove the sea lanes in search of filibusters, contraband, neutrality violators, in the nasty Nicaraguan "fuss."

But the Angel only chuckled at the mariner's nasty humor; laughed — he found it easy to laugh these days—and swelled with growing gladness as he trod the quarter deck. The schooner was slipping like a drab ghost into the placid Gulf, into a soft and starless night.

And sleek De Lugo laughed also, a nasty, lascivious laugh, as he caressed his jet mustache and conjured up the fate in store for the simple fool who had played right into his hands.

CHAPTER II

MUTINY!

"HUMPA — thumpa — humpa — thump!"

With measured pulse the ancient "up and down" engine below decks drove the *Terrapin* southward through a glassy sea. Stripped to faded dungarees, bronzed by Caribbean sun, Jord Cavender stood stiffly at the wheel. Eyes bloodshot from sleeplessness watched from between narrowed lids the approach of Shark Donlin to the poop. Meeting the man's insolent stare, the Angel snapped his head curtly. He gave over the wheel, mouth hard, chest swelling.

Stark anger rode his heart tides. The skipper turned, darted down the poop ladder. He stood in the waist, hesitant, glaring at the fo'c'stle. There was not a man on deck.

For an instant only he debated, fingers clenching. Then with a fiendish grin he leaped to the fo'c'stle hatches. He slid them open and took the steps by twos to plunge into their midst—this Cavender—quivering to enforce discipline. And it was a discipline not of the

sea which he did not understand, but of the towering rigs that were a part of him.

The monotonous drum of the engine sounded hollowly in his ears and in his fancy became the churn of the rotary. The churlish seven who surged to their feet at his precipitate entry seemed only mutinous "roughnecks" gumming the works, queering the hole for the gold of rival outfits. Again he was the Angel —tool-pusher—who well knew how to handle such as these.

"Who brought up those guns?" With the low words went a smile that scourged like a lash.

Tense, hostile, they leered at him. They licked their lips as they stood before a half-opened case of weapons gleaming in the half-light of dingy kerosene lamps. Hayden, a burly herring-choker from the bluenose fleets of Nova Scotia, squinted his one eye, fingered the spike he had been using as a pry. He grinned.

"I'm yer scut, Cappy!" he sneered, thrusting a scarred face into the Angel's own. "Jest what was yer figgerin' on doin' now that I've told yer?"

The Cavender chuckled. Beneath skin as soft, as smooth as a woman's, his great muscles rippled, swelled as he measured the huge bulk of the Nova Scotian. Silently, rhythmically, his left hand lashed out. Like a manacle it fastened to the man's right wrist. A sudden sob of unbated breath lifted as the jackals backed, fingers clutching the stained hilts of seamen's knives.

A corded fist constricted at the Angel's side, moved a scant foot with his weight behind it. *Sock!* The herring-choker jack-knifed, breath driven from his lungs. *Smack!* Flush to the jaw flashed that flailing bludgeon, snapped Hayden's tousy head back. It dropped him chin down on the floor, lone eye glazing. Swiftly the skipper's glance swept them. He laughed in their faces.

"Now you!"

He took a single step toward Ketner, a towering Dane. He grinned derisively for the giant paled, gave backward before him.

"Draw a bucket of water and souse him. The rest of you turn to and nail up that case of rifles."

STUNNED, muttering, Ketner leaped up the companionway. Four of the rebellious crew dropped to their knees and nailed down the lid of the gun case. They hoisted it between them, fairly ran as they replaced it in the hold.

But Jord Cavender saw none of that. He stood motionless, staring at a withy, snarling Brazilian who fondled his knife, cursing softly in Portuguese. Mono, the monkey, was untamed, dangerous, un-impressed by the collapse of Hayden. And in that exchanging, hate-filled stare was a deadly enmity born.

Into the Angel's constricted throat welled a hoarse note, voice of a fighter scenting battle.

"If you're not as yellow as hell, nigger, draw that blade!"

Mono shuddered, shrank under the sting of the hateful appellation. He stiffened, sucked his breath, black eyes snapping with venom. For an instant his rage urged him into battle with the big skipper. Then he teetered on the balls of his feet. Long, slender fingers coiled about his knife hilt. His gaze fell before what he saw in the laughing orbs of the Cavender. Silently he slunk after his fellows.

The Angel filled his lungs.

"Yellow!"

He stood aside as Ketner came down with brimming buckets and then darted up the companionway. From the galley where he appeased his hunger he strode to the bridge. Shark Donlin jerked an expressive thumb eastward where a blood-red sun rose in crimson mist.

"Yer troubles ain't over yet, Skip," he volunteered. "Ye're thinkin' now that ye're a man o' guts 'count o' the way ye cleaned out yon fo'c'stle. I c'n tell by the smile on yer pan. But the *chubasco*—the hurricane—will straighten

out yer face fer ye. I'll promise ye that. An' she's comin' too, ye c'n lay to it."

Jord Cavender said nothing, gripped the rail, thin lips compressing to a fine line as he stared into the eerie red fog reaching westward with bloody fingers. The sea was still, air dead. The calm before the storm . . . storm of giant, wind-lashed combers racing cayward or storm of human passion unbridled in the Cain lust. Let it come, either way.

He chuckled, elbowed Donlin aside and took the spokes.

"Shark," he rumbled. "Here's the *Terrapin.* She's mine, bought and paid for, savvy? De Lugo played me for a sucker and I took the bait. I see it all now. Looks easy, don't it? Maybeso, Sharkie boy, but before you and your yonder hell hounds take this ship you'll have to pick up guts. You're yellow—too yellow to cut the buck!"

DONLIN'S face purpled with fury. He gripped the rail, staring into the crimson east, cursing softly. The Angel searching the shore off the starboard bow. Suddenly he grinned and put the helm hard over. The mate caught unaware, lurched across the rail, caught himself, whirled upon the skipper, red-faced, stammering.

"What the hell's the idee?" he rasped, checking himself at the fire in the Angel's eye. "What you tryin' to . . . ?"

"If I'm not off in my reckoning," drawled the Angel, pointing dead ahead, "yonder is the Cape. Behind it is Gracias à Dios. I'm putting in there to pick up a crew. Go forward and tell those dogs to pack their bags."

The mate's eyes widened. He smiled. "So that's yer game, eh?"

Laughing softly, he bounded down the ladder, eyes upon the open fo'c'stle hatch, hands signaling before him. Reaching the waist, he grinned slyly. He slipped to the bulwark to peer at the palm-studded coast line. And the answer to his signal was swift, sudden, deadly.

With arrow-like flight, a bright object clove the air. It smashed against the spokes, burned along the Angel's forearm, caromed away in hissing flight to plunge into a lifting swell. A knife! By only a hair's breadth had it missed its mark.

Grin fiendish, Jord Cavender whirled. His burning glance swept the vessel. The mate stood stiffly at the gunwale, engrossed in the hazy shore line; no other was in sight, though the big skipper sensed rather than saw a flicker of movement forward. His command lifted like the snarl of a cutlass drawn from its scabbard.

"Tumble 'em up, Shark!" he roared. "I'm telling 'em now, or beating hell out of 'em—one!"

Shark Donlin shook himself like a spaniel emerging from a cold lagoon. He turned mocking eyes upon his captain. His lips curled.

"Sure, Mister," he drawled, insolently. "I'll rouse 'em up—you tell 'em!"

With a glare of hate he spat upon the deck, darted below.

THE Angel waited with tensed muscles. Showdown! A low muttering lifted from below decks, told of a coming fight to hold this disreputable craft of his. Harshly it rose — a paen of hate.

Then they were swarming to the deck, Shark Donlin in the van, seven rum-inflamed devils at his back. Swiftly they came on, faces convulsed with the lust to destroy, smouldering eyes raised to the lone figure on the dinky bridge.

Deftly lashing the wheel, Jord Cavender swept to the taffrail legs pumping stiffly, arms folded across his bulging chest. And they halted, those hellions; paused before his silent contempt; quailed before the poise of him.

"Lousy, rum-swilling wharf rats!" In low biting phrases he pegged them.

Smiling anger! Light-hearted lethal

threat! They were seeing an Angel that was new to them.

"Not a yellow hound among you but deserves killing. I treated you like men, with a smile, but you lay back your ears. I'm putting you ashore at the Cape, but first I want the rat that heaved that knife. Push him out of the pack, men. I want to break him . . . break him . . ."

His voice trailed off, smile faded; for the steady throb of the engine was suddenly stilled. It started again; then subsided to a silence broken only by the slap of lazy wave against a wallowing hull, the low drone of muttered undertone from the crew. From below came the patter of feet. Gomez, the Cuban engineer, gained the deck.

"Engine, she ees dead, sair!" Shifty eyes belied the truth of his assertion.

"Very good!"

The Angel bit off the acknowledgment. He leaped to the wheel as a phantom gust hit the *Terrapin*, heeled her over. Shrilly his order to run up canvas lifted above the whine of wind in the rigging. Shark Donlin's laugh was maddening; not a man stirred to obey.

Again on an even keel, the *Terrapin* gathered headway. She moved slowly before the rising sea.

Teeth flashing, the Angel stood forth from behind the wheel, balancing upon the balls of his feet. Soundlessly he ripped to the rail, vaulted to the deck, bore down upon them with cat-like grace, dominant, befisted. Swiftly he appraised their faces.

"YOU!" he singled out the lowering Mono. "Did you heave that blade?"

"Ah, Senhor," the swart Brazilian snapped from between his teeth. "I am ashame' that I do not steek you like the peeg."

Jord Cavender frowned. He took a step toward the man; then paused at Shark Donlin's snarled warning.

"Stop comin', Cappy! The boys has decided that they ain't trustin' their lives to no shore-trained skipper. It ain't safe. You don't know these waters; you don't know nothin' much, so we're takin' over the ship."

"Rotten liar!" The Angel spat the nasty word in the mate's teeth. "You sold yourselves, you stinking rats. Sold yourselves to the Spic—De Lugo. It's his gold you're thinking of, the cargo, below decks."

Raucous laughter drowned him out.

" 'Ear 'er!" shouted Hayden, recent lesson forgotten. His one eye gleamed malevolently under the stimulus of deep draughts of raw Maracaibo rum. " 'Ear the purty judy. She says we're a-thinkin' o' featherin' our nests. Ain't that rotten mean o' 'er? Imagine us doin' dirt to a judy what ain't never gutted a fish."

The Angel flamed at the jibe. His smile faded, face graying as spit showered him, spit from the sneering lips of Mono, the monkey. Brazen, hateful, threatening, the Brazilian played with his knife hilt as the skipper inched toward him.

The mate again took the play.

"Stop comin', I tell yer," he gritted, "unless ye wanta die. The *Terrapin* is ours from here on. You're takin' the dory an' goin' where ye please—to the Cape or to the bottom. There she is; climb in an' we'll lower ye away. If ye're on this ship in five minutes, we'll be givin' ye the deep six."

Jord Cavender laughed aloud, a soft, sibilant laugh. But there was no humor in his cold, green eyes that flickered strangely as he watched them hem him in.

"You dogs and who else?" he snarled.

Swiftly his hand flashed to his belt. A knife glinted on high, winked with blinding speed into the deck before him.

"Cross that blade, scum!" he thundered recklessly. "If there's one among you that considers himself a man, a fighter . . .or two of you . . .or all of you . . . let's get at it."

CHAPTER III
STORM

FOR an instant they wavered before his magnificent gesture. Then with a squeal of joy, Mono drew his knife, sent it slithering into the deck. Smirking confidently, Shark Donlin followed suit.

"Two!" The Cavender's sneer rankled. "A little nigger and a big mick! No more, roughnecks? Good, let's go!"

As the hated epithet fell upon the Brazilian's ears, he seemed to shrink, corded veins standing out in his forehead like tensed wires. Then he was darting toward his humming blade, with the Angel matching him stride for stride. Shark Donlin, chuckling, standing easily watched the play careless of the result. His was an ace in the hole.

Mono, the quicker and more agile of the two, plucked his weapon from the teak even as the Cavender stooped, reaching for his own. A swart, bony-knuckled hand flashed backward, poised for a brief moment, drove forward in the lethal stroke. It happened then!

Like a bludgeon, the ham-like fist of the big pusher catapulted to the cruel, thin-lipped mouth of the monkey. Smashed back against the bulwark, crushed, broken, the Brazilian muttered a discordant prayer as ruby spume boiled from his toothless gums.

From the gamut of fanned-out mutineers an awed sob lifted. The blood drained from the ruddy face of the Shark as Jord Cavender caught up his knife in mid-stride, hurtled forward, teeth bared, ire-crazed eyes fastened upon the mate.

Swiftly the right hand of Donlin flashed to a gun-hideout at his shoulder. His lips were blue, face cold as berg ice. He leveled the weapon. he glared over the bead into the battle-lit orbs of the fast-charging Cavender.

"Take it, Mister! Yer asked fer it!"

The Angel's laugh gritted.

"Shoot, Shark," he exulted. "Thief! Yellow snake! Coward! That's my gun you're triggering . . . never meant to kill a Cavender, Shark! Shoot, you rat!"

His tones went through the wavering pack like a rapier stroke. They muttered in awed inaction as the pistol flamed, roared, as two bundred pounds of outraged bone and muscle drove forward in a flying tackle with hot lead searing deep and red across a straining, corded neck. And before the mate could fire a second time the Angel was on him, had hurled him crashing into their midst, into a mad tangle of mauling fists, clutching fingers, flashing daggers.

In desperate tempo, Shark Donlin's clubbed pistol swung short, rose and fell, hacking at tensed muscles as hard as gun-metal itself. Howling curses, he struggled to free himself from the Angel's devastating grip, lost his feet, felt himself crushed to the deck which was heaving in the first tortured thrust of the *chubasco*—the tropical hurricane.

LIKE a crazed thing the *Terrapin* slewed under the blast, but not a man on her decks gave the slightest heed. What matter that the vessel heeled far over, that the rotten sticks groaned, that each succeeding blast but added to the imminence of disaster? Above decks was a blood-lust to be sated, a fighting heart to be stilled.

Like rabied terriers they swarmed to the kill. Flesh crashed against flesh; cold steel drank deep of the pulsing blood stream of the Cavender. He did not feel their blows. By the very power of his flailing right arm he hurled them back, kept them at range while he held the squirming mate helpless with left hand and gouging knees. And he laughed —this valiant—laughed for the very joy of his youth, for his strength, his fighting courage.

Eight to one! Even fight. Howling defiance, the big skipper floundered to one knee, lifted the screaming mate

above his head, hurled him in the teeth of the avid mutineers. A heavy wrench, hurled by the engineer, caromed off Jord Cavender's head, drove him to the sloshing decks in a blaze of dancing lights, ebbing senses.

The mad, exultant cry of the blood-hungry hellions smote the lowering skies, whirled away in the sweep of the shrieking gale. The wind was fast pounding the once glassy sea into a torment of gnashing fury; the helpless *Terrapin* was buffeting crazily as the crew swept in to finish the groggy Angel.

But they reckoned without their host. Shaking his leonine head like some great stricken beast, the tool-pusher fought back with the fury of the hate that convulsed him. By instinct alone, with vicious strokes of piston-like legs, with unaimed swings of hammer-like fists, he held them at bay the while he struggled for clearness of thought, of vision. With the canniness of madness he stemmed that lethal tide.

In the scuppers, Mono shrieked for them to destroy him, venturing nothing save unheeded howls snatched away by the wind. Shark Donlin rolled groaning in the spray-lashed waist, stunned, tamed, content to let others carry on the battle.

Slowly the Angel's brain cleared and with returning reason he was again indomitable, the aggressor. The pack had squandered its golden opportunity. Wading into them, the pusher brushed aside their knives, their spikes, their fists, scarce feeling the sting of his wounds, reveling in the mad passion of unequal conflict.

Like wolves, they hemmed him in, ducking, dodging, waiting but for the opening that would leave his midriff open to a thrust, for the stroke that would spill his guts upon the streaming deck. Came choking gasps, crunch of bone-jarring blows, patter of bare feet slithering in pools of bloody spume. Seven hellions bayed a fearless, fighting heart.

THE *Terrapin* was floundering now —first in deep, wave-hemmed troughs, then at the crest of giant combers racing mountain-high out of nowhere. The sun, no longer a flaming scourge, faded in a glowering murk with sullen cloud banks heaving up out of a tortured eastern sky. Deep indigo fingers clawed from three horizons, hurling raindrops large as eggs, spraying the battle-torn decks of the schooner in savage gusts.

Then came the wanton force of the hurricane! With predatory whine it struck the stalled vessel, appearing to bury it for a moment under a horizontal avalanche of water that drenched the fighters, that hurled them clutching for hand holds like chips in a millrace. Scuppers running full, the *Terrapin* lurched free from the trammeling waves bobbed upward into a maelstrom of wind-driven spray that stung like whip-ends.

It grew darker. Jagged lightning clove the inky sky to reveal a phantom, white-bordered wisp—a feathery, smoke-like pendant drooping from the zenith. And not even the roar of the hellish wind, the awful roll of the thunder drums could drown out the shriek of terror its sight inspired.

"Good God! *Bomba Marina* — the waterspout!"

Faintly over the din of storm Jord Cavender heard the agonized wail, an insane cachinnation of a man who knew his Caribbean. In his first glimpse of that inconsequential coiling wisp, Shark Donlin sensed his doom — trembled in the promise of death, swift and terrible.

The drenching, the anguished cry of the mate, served to clear the cobwebs from the Angel's throbbing brain. Following the direction of Donlin's wild stare, the skipper glanced aloft, watched with strange fascination the inching down through blazing heavens of that spiraling smoke-wisp. Like a nightmare of doom it descended until it appeared to kiss the tortured bosom of the sea not fifty feet from the *Terrapin*.

Hell then broke loose. A black cone, spinning dizzily, descended the wisp with meteoric velocity. A shriek as of ten thousand full-throated sirens was suddenly loosed upon the air, drowning out other storm noises. The waves appeared to rise up on all sides of the schooner. The boat itself lifted, spun crazily, settled. . . .

Jord Cavender clung tenaciously to the poop ladder where he had been flung in the first full flush of the *chubasco.* And glancing about him at the fear-drenched eyes of the pack, eyes that had so recently glowed with the Cain lust, he laughed brittlely. Craven dogs!

Blindly, by dint of all the strength he could muster, he drew himself erect. Somewhere in the deep recesses of his brain was a small voice that warned him that if the *Terrapin* was to ride out this terrible upheaval — mightier than anything the imagination can paint — someone must reach the wheel; someone must keep the staggering craft clear of cays, with the wind behind her.

Inch by inch he crept up the ladder, clinging with hands, with feet, against the titan forces that clutched at him, that lifted him. Then as the faint remaining light faded into blackness of the pit, he was wrenched from his precarious hold, whirled about and into a hell of pounding air, breath torn from his aching lungs, prey to the capricious lust of the storm.

CHAPTER IV

DERELICT

THE coming of Jord Cavender to Gracias à Dios is still a topic of conversation in the grog shops. Over brimming glasses of potent *guayra* are strange tales told, but none are stranger than those woven about the coming and going of the bronzed giant in tatters who drifted to the Cape on the heels of a hurricane that scattered death and destruction along the flat *playas* of the Caribbean.

To this day there are none who know just how the man fought his way through to Gracias à Dios. Indeed it is doubtful whether the Angel himself could have told. Only the gods of the deep, whom he bested, know the full tale of his struggle in the clutch of huge combers racing shoreward with express train speed.

It is not unlikely that, with wind and tide behind him, he was lifted to the crest of a huge wave, carried there and laid down without harm. When quizzed as to the facts, the tool-pusher's smile was infectious, his shrug perfect, his *"quien sabe"* convincing. Who knows?

Certain it is that he swam safely to shore, a feat that pales beside that of trudging along the beach to the Cape with the mighty Segovia to be crossed en route. Perhaps he was fortunate enough to find a vagrant dugout or *pitpan* canoe in which to cross, but the evidence points to his having swam that turgid, crocodile-infested expanse with the same indomitable drive that had characterized him since his youth. *Quien sabe?*

When at last he stalked down the squalid street of the town, he was indeed a sight for the many eyes riveted upon him, eyes that were accustomed to seeing the strange derelicts who clutter the Mosquito Coast. Gaunt, sunken-eyed, bearded, he was naked to the waist with the frayed ends of tattered dungarees flapping grotesquely about his sinewy thighs.

Stooped, with dragging stride that bespoke unutterable weariness, he moved toward the lagoon, unconscious of the stares of the curious, fevered eyes searching the drab signs that invited purchasers to *barata, cantina, cafe.*

IN sudden decision he turned, passed through the matting flaps that hung in the portal of Gringo Jack's Grog Shop. It was dingy inside in striking contrast to the white glare of outdoors.

To this fact may be laid the mistake made by a brown-skinned, sloe-eyed harpy in laying hands upon his bronzed arms. It was the magnificent man of him that she saw, the poise of a well-shaped head on a corded neck, a barrel chest tapering to a wasp-like waist. Her mistake lay in her inability to read his eyes, hot, unfriendly eyes that were tightened to pin points.

From a filthy corner where he had hurled her, she screamed tirades of abuse. A flood of unspeakable profanity was suddenly broken off as he faced her, twisted lips curled in a grin that chilled her heart. That expression sent her slinking from the barroon. Gringo Jack, a lovable reprobate with a past shrouded in lawlessness, chuckled audibly, sucked on a bubbly pipe as he appraised the stranger.

A pair of inebriated *ulleros* looked at the Angel, saw his eyes, crossed themselves and muttered prayers as they backed away. But Sal Palaez, ugly, burly, town bully and man of importance at the Cape, spoke his mind for all to hear, voiced a hidden challenge as he measured the Cavender.

"*Cuidado,* boys! Be careful! It seems that there are tigers even among the lousy beach rats!" He downed his drink, grinned maddeningly at the Angel. He fingered a dirty *cingulo* where reposed the knife that made men fear him. "Woman-eating tigers!"

No flush stained Jord Cavender's face at the jibe. Stiffly he pumped to the mean bar, an unvoiced order in his manner, an order that Gringo Jack filled with a double portion of rum. There was a troubled look in the grog shop keeper's eyes as he carefully removed the pipestem from his mouth and dropped a free hand beneath the bar to fondle a long-handled horse pistol. . . .

"I wouldn't start nothin' in here, Sal," he smiled. "This is a grog shop; not a slaughter house. If there's killin' to be did here, I'll do it."

Pelaez gritted a laugh. "Remember, Señor Jack, that I am Pelaez, the *salinero* with sharp wits and sharper knife. I was only reminding the big gringo that it is very pleasant weather for a fight."

LAUGHING noiselessly warmed by the sharp liquor, Jord Cavender laid down his glass, smiled into two beady eyes, laughed at him.

"I've come a long way, amigo, and would rest, but if you have fighters—good ones—you might bring them to me."

"Perhaps," drawled the mestizo, smouldering, "there are no fighters to be had who are half so good as Sal Pelaez. What then, Señor? He, I have a belief that my little blade will make you squeal like the pig. No?"

"And I have still another idea, Sal," rasped Gringo Jack, laying his long pistol upon the bar. "You may be Pelaez, salt baron of Segovia and fastest knife at the Cape, but I'm . . . I'm . . . well, I'm just Gringo Jack, sabe? If you're not out o' here in seconds, they'll be feedin' you to the sharks in the lagoon."

Gringo Jack had seen the weariness in the big American, had sensed his fighting courage, reasoned that in his present condition the stranger would fall easy prey to the breed's magic. So he made his play and none knew how well he meant it better than Pelaez whose Indian boatmen carried his salt to the most remote tribes of the jungle hinterland.

For an instant, though, he was tempted to defy the warped grog shop keeper, tempted to bait this upstanding white whose laugh was as brittle as glassware, whose eyes were hot as coals. He half drew his knife, saw Gringo Jack's long fingers curl about the grip of his gun, shrugged, sank his blade in his sash.

"Even the great Pelaez may not fight the many." He bowed curtly to four stevedores who had been playing at *cinqueña* at a scarred table. Then his

hawkish visage was thrust into the Angel's, his low oily tones heavy with venom:

"The big Señor is pale. His legs tremble. He looks sad as he thinks of death. It is well! Pelaez has scored another victory over a frog-croaking gringo."

Stiffly he turned upon his heel, slid toward the portal. He paused as the mat was hurled aside to admit an undersized native, panting from exertion. For an instant he stood hesitant as he accustomed his eyes to the gloom.

"*Que quiere?*" quizzed Gringo Jack. "What do you wish, Tuweha?"

"*Quiere sal,*" replied the youth promptly, fixing the salt baron with appealing glance. "I came for salt for my people. Many are sick with fever of the leeches; it is now time for the fish drying and the making of jerky. Without salt, the death chant will sound in our village; the hunger gods will laugh. Señor, we will pay."

"Pay, yes!" sneered Pelaez. "With what and when? Already you owe me fifty *grumos* of *ulle*—fifty measures of rubber. Until that has been paid the Rio Muerte Toonglas will get no more salt."

Rio Muerte! Jord Cavender started at the name. River of Death! What a pregnant meaning it had once had, how empty of meaning now that he was penniless, stripped of his vessel, of arms, of hope.

"But Señor," protested the native youth. "There has been much sickness. Many of our best *ulleros* went out after rubber but never returned. The rains have been bad and the Smoos stole what rubber we had gathered as well as our rafts on which it was loaded. El Señor Dios has not been good to the Toonglas of Rio Muerte."

"Bah!" Pelaez snapped his fingers. "Save your breath for your trip upriver. Pay the fifty *grumos* of rubber and I will send you away with a canoe full of salt. Otherwise . . . there is the sea; there is salt in it. Help yourself."

LAUGHING fiendishly, the *salinero* brushed past the hopeless Indian, strode from the place. Trembling with suppressed wrath, Jord Cavender poured another drink, drank that and still another. Gringo Jack studied him intently and there was a friendly gleam in the little man's eyes as he spoke.

"Years at the Cape have cured me of bein' curious," he volunteered. "But if you're offa the beach, then I'm the President o' Nicaragua. I've an old shirt hangin' on a nail in the other room that you're welcome to if you can get into it, an' there's food in there to take the edge off that hunger. You're not of the stripe that drifts in here. Have another drink on Gringo Jack."

The Angel warmed to him.

"Sure," he agreed. "Don't care if I do. I've had three on the house already; guess another won't make a whole lot of difference. Take one yourself."

Gringo Jack's eyes widened as his temper hung in the balance. Then his scarred face broke into a grin.

"Guts!" he cried, laughing delightedly. "The pure quill. From the minute you bellied up to Sal, I had you pegged as a fighter. Here's to you, *hombre,* an' may you live to be a hundred before the vultures pick your shins."

In the fellowship of kindred spirits, they drank deep.

"Now bring on the food," smiled soft-eyed Jord Cavender, "and the shirt."

When his great hunger was appeased and Gringo Jack had squeezed him into the none-too-ample garment, the Angel turned in sudden thought to find Tuweha, the Toonglas native, gone.

"Where's the salt works where the big *mestizo* holds forth?" he queried, his smile fading to cold businesslike calculation.

"Down along the lagoon . . . dug pools an' a long clapboard warehouse," replied the rum merchant. "Better not fuss with Sal. He's a wild 'un with a knife."

"Uh-huh!" The Angel's tone was flat. "So he said. When I get a knife

of my own, I may decide to tame him down."

Gringo Jack reached under his bar, slid out a long rubber-gatherer's blade with polished hardwood handle.

"This belonged to a feller who had it figgered that a flyin' knife beats a bullet. He heaved it across my bar, an' seein' as he won't never call for it, I'm passin' it on to you. Don't make the same mistake he did, *sabe?* If you get into a jam, come a-runnin' an' I'll do what I can."

Jord Cavender stuck the crooked weapon in his waistband, nodded, passed out into the bright sunlight.

CHAPTER V

TIDINGS

THE Angel found Tuweha without difficulty. The Toonglas youth squatted disconsolately beside his *pitpan* canoe at the lagoon border, waiting vainly, hesitant to commence his long return trip without the life-giving salt for which he had been sent to the Cape.

Silently the big American seated himself beside the native, saying nothing, content to allow the youth to reason out his friendliness. For an hour they sat thus, then from the canoe, Tuweha produced turtle eggs, fresh plantains, and a sweet native beer brewed from manioc. Without words they ate together. In this communion a lasting friendship was born.

In the back of the Cavender's brain was intense curiosity to learn of the Rio Muerte from which the Toonglas had come. In English, in halting Spanish, in the universal language of signs, he struggled to make himself understood and at last came increasing understanding. The native fear of the beast that was supposed to lurk in the caves of Bobada came out early.

Throughout the afternoon they conversed, and well into the soft, tropic night. Then when the frog chorus in the mangroves reached its apogee, when the lights of the town were snuffed out, they rose—the Angel and Tuweha—gripped hands.

With the Indian sculling the canoe and Jord Cavender stalking silently along the shore, they moved like wraiths down the lagoon. And as they moved, the white man fingered the hilt of his blade; the native thrilled to the touch of a fire-hardened tiger lance and a short bow with a bundle of arrows of the deadly *manchineel.*

Silently the native beached his frail craft and the two glided toward the salt shed that loomed like some distorted gargantuan monster in the starglow. Afar off the restless Caribbean pulsed at a storm-torn beach and the trades whined eerily across the low dunes.

A dog barked, yelped once and was silent as a bow twanged. A drowsy and startled watchman rose before them only to sprawl senseless at the hand of the big tool-pusher. With an abbreviated crash the mean door gave before the hurtling shoulder of the Angel and they were both inside, tensed for a possible attack. There was none; the place was empty.

Swiftly they went to work. The white man slung two sacks to his shoulder, the native one, and they hurried with them to the canoe. Three such trips they made while the watchman raced for Pelaez and his cohorts.

Upon the arrival of the salt baron and his men, cursing, threatening, brandishing weapons, they found nothing and heard no more save the faint plash of a dipping paddle on the lagoon and a taunting laugh of satisfaction from the blackness toward the town. Night birds had flown—the Toonglas toward the Rio Muerte with nine bags of life-giving salt, the Angel to the sleep of untroubled conscience in a thicket beneath the stars.

DAY followed day with big Jord Cavender living the life of the most disreputable of beach derelicts.

Entirely without funds, he scorned to live off the generosity of the friendly Gringo Jack, subsisted in the rather splendid way the tropics provide. And each rising sun found him more gaunt, more tortured by the failure of his enterprise, more hopeless of the future.

How could he ever dream of rebuilding his fortunes and trying again? From what little knowledge he had gained of Bobada, of the Beast, of the perils lurking for him who covets the sinister treasure of Mondragon, he was more convinced than ever that the quest would demand a well-equipped expedition. A man would be worse than insane to venture into that jungle hinterland without boats, without guns, without fighting devils who cared not for a foe's repute.

Indeed the fetish that the Angel had nourished all through those dismal years became like a dim dream. The hope that had spurred him on dwindled to the merest flicker when he considered the fight he had made, the years that were lost, the effort necessary to make a fresh start.

But that flicker persisted, buoyed his belief that Shark Donlin might have taken the *Terrapin* through. That was the thought that made life worth the living, that caused the Angel to spurn an opportunity to work his way to the States on a tramp steamer. Once again on the deck of his rusty schooner, he would settle with the mutineers, take money from a hidden source inside her, and equip properly for a joust with the Beast of Bobada.

Nor did he doubt that if Donlin and his mutineers had succeeded in winning through and landing the contraband, that they would attempt the great folly. The Angel had seen the gold-lust burning in their eyes as he told them of Diego Mondragon, the Conquistador, who had sailed his trim caravel up the broad Segovia on plunder bent.

He had seen their fingers tense at his description of the rapacious Don's betrayal of the trusting river natives, how his lustful swashbucklers had slain the warriors, defiled their women, looted the sacred treasure houses of *caquique* and *curadora*—of chief and priestess—of precious green stones taken from natives far to the south and virgin gold from the bars of the far Poteca.

And the glitter in their avid eyes had not been dimmed at the telling of the rise of outraged tribesmen; of gathering fleets of dugout canoes bristling with spearmen; of dusky bodies, lurking in jungle coverts, armed with poisoned darts and arrows; the moan of the conches that gathered the vengeance-seeking hordes. Nor yet at the tale of the destruction of the harassed Spaniards in the caves of Bobada where they had buried their treasure and laid their bones.

It mattered not to those reckless mutineers that of a legion of stalwart-hearted who had followed that crimson trail, who had staked all for a try for that treasure, no one had ever returned. Truly Bobada—folly—was well named.

But when men dream of gold they laugh at dangers, at fevers, at savage creatures and venomous snakes, at a Beast that sates a voracious appetite with the flesh of human victims. Yes, from the story their eyes had told, Shark Donlin and his hellions would surely point the prow of the *Terrapin* up the Segovia, if the storm gods had spared them.

THUS it was that Angel Cavender chose to stay at the Cape. He waited, talked not at all and listened to the idle prattle of the beach rats. At times he fraternized with friendly Gringo Jack, drank his rum, hearkened to his yarns, and left him as much in doubt as ever as to the reasons that drew the big American into the tropics.

Strangely, Sal Pelaez failed to connect the brawny Yank with the loot of his salt house, but in his more mellow hours in the grog shops he boasted that he would have the life of the youth—Tuweha—and that the Toonglas tribesmen of the Rio Muerte would pay dearly

for the necessity he had denied them.

Then Tuweha came back to the Cape with a hearty handshake, a broad smile, a dog-like worship in his eyes for his white benefactor. Thanks to that midnight foray, all was now well with his people. And they were desirous of seeing the stalwart who had made their welfare possible.

The invitation stamped a grin on the sober face of the Angel, put a new idea into his head. A month had passed without word of the *Terrapin*. If still afloat she was due at the Cape.

He would give her another week, then go to the Rio Muerte with Tuweha. Once there, with the confidence of the Toonglas, mayhap he could still push through to solve the greatest riddle of the Segovia hinterland. The plans of men . . .

Laboriously he made Tuweha understand his desire, his hope, and forthwith those two commenced a vigil—the Angel watching the upriver traffic by day, the Toonglas by night. And as fate would have it, sleep claimed the native youth one yellow dawn when he should have been most fully awake.

Like a whipped terrier he crawled to Jord Cavender as he lay asleep in their covert, whispered in his ear that a ship had passed, was breasting the sluggish tide of the Segovia. And his information did not end there. He added all that he had gleaned from the grog shops.

". . . and this *diablo,* Pelaez, is with them, Señor! He will guide them to Bobada, it is said. In return they will put in at the river villages to traffic in salt and rum."

WIDE-AWAKE, yet stunned into inaction by news that he had lost hope of hearing, Jord Cavender sat long with hands corded into fists that bulked with white knuckles. Now that the thing had happened, that the mutineers were going to Rio Muerte, what chance did he alone have of stopping them, of taking that which was his?

The grave Indian watching the battle going on inside his friend, waited for the inner fires to burn out. He was startled when the Cavender spoke, flat, toneless, gritting . . .

"One chance in a million!" he intoned as though to himself, then: "Get me a canoe, Tuweha, and a paddle. I'm going in after them, now."

"You will die, Señor."

The Angel's laugh jarred.

"What's a life or two between friends?" he queried, and his soft eyes filmed as he thought of his mother. "Can you get the canoe, boy?"

"Señor!" the dusky youth leaped to his feet, body quivering, eyes alight. "In the *cantinas* men say that the ship was manned by five *Americanos* with much money, many guns and a will to take the *mal tessoro*—the evil treasure—of the Rio Muerte. They drank much rum, took a great store with them and agreed with Pelaez to help him punish the Toonglas—my people—because they are poor and cannot pay their debt.

"Come, we will paddle up the Rio faster than it has ever been traveled before. I must reach there before them, that my arrows may drink the blood of that *diablo.*"

A happy laugh boiled to the Angel's lips as the full import of the native's words struck home. The languor of the tropics dropped from him like a shroud as he sprang erect.

"*Vamanos*—we go!"

Swiftly they launched the *pitpan* canoe, dipped their paddles. An early-feeding stork croaked hoarsely, vaulted upward, to escape the rush of the frail craft as it darted away from the rising sun.

CHAPTER VI

QUEST

FOR days the broad paddles of Jord Cavender and Tuweha flashed their *pitpan* westward. Through a maze of

mangrove-hemmed inlets, out of the broad sweep of the lower river, into the semi-gloom of the fast-enfolding jungle, they raced with the power-driven *Terrapin* getting farther ahead with each succeeding hour.

Muscles that shrieked with the agony of effort soon changed to bands of steel that tirelessly breasted the down current. The Angel grew hard—hard of arm, harder of spirit.

Each mile upstream took them that much closer to the first portage, where a *pitpan* must be carried around boiling rapids, where the heavier dugouts are detoured on rollers, beyond which the *Terrapin* might not pass.

As they neared the rapids, Tuweha's restless eyes scanned the verdant walls of the river borders. His low exclamation, his rigidly extended index finger, disclosed a rent in the jungle wall.

Trembling with ill-suppressed excitement, the Angel lashed the canoe forward with frenzied strokes, shot it through a drape of plantain scrub into a glassy lagoon framed with giant ceiba trees festooned with hoary moss and garlands of crimson flowers.

"Terrapin!"

There was a love note in Jord Cavender's cry as he sighted the schooner, a cry that trailed into a sob as he appraised her rusty, stickless hull. Swiftly they paddled to her side.

The Angel boarded her in a leap, face black, huge thighs pumping, fists corded in anticipated resistance. A troop of monkeys scolded as they quitted her deck, swinging into the overhanging verdure. A flock of *lara real*—the yellow-crested parrot screamed from the leafy ceiling. A be-combed iguana dropped with sodden splash, like a rotten limb from a leaning trunk. But of humans, far more sinister, there was no sign.

Below decks went the Cavender. At every hand was mute evidence of the battle the gallant old ship had made to survive. From a hidden locker, the erstwhile skipper took a pair of dungarees to replace those that scarce covered his nakedness, side arms and ammunition against a grim and future need, a dainty urn—his fetish—that he had mourned as lost in the Carribbean.

Back upon the deck he was forced to fairly tear the Toonglas youth from a sack of salt he had found and opened, salt that he was cramming into his mouth and swallowing as though it were sugar. Thus does the jungle starve its children.

FOLLOWED more days of arduous paddling, trying portages, nights of horror at grips with the voracious mosquito hordes. It was the time of the rains and the lowering skies wept incessantly; the streams continued to rise; the jungle sweated and steamed. The banks of the river drew in and from its borders of *gamalote* grass and unbelievable lily pads rose a stinking effluvia—a foggy shroud lethal with fever.

Up a vine-draped lagoon they pointed to avoid the turbulent water of the Quiroz rapids and somewhere in its sinuous and remote reach, Tuweha steered the canoe through a wall of foliage and onto a bay, open to the sky.

The sight was thrice welcome in that the air seemed clear and fresh, the sun peered through a rift in the clouds to disclose smoke coiling from a collection of stilted huts—rude cane and palm dwellings of the Rio Muerte's Toonglas tribesmen.

For miles, Tuweha had paddled like a madman, eyes upon his weapons, hopeful of intercepting Pelaez and the mutineers before they reached the village. Now, at sight of an old man squatting disconsolantly on the shore, he knew that he was too late, groaned.

They drove the *pitpan* high above the eddies. The Toonglas youth raced to the ancient, who regarded them morosely from beneath grizzled brows.

From the larger of the huts came the moan of a conch, low monotone of singsong voices, rhythmical shuffle of swift-

ly-dragged feet. In the strange Toonglas twitter, Tuweha quizzed the old man, slumped visibly as he heard the news. Slowly he returned to the Angel, crushed, hopeless.

"They have been here!" he announced glumly.

"How many days since?"

"Five!"

"They . . . they . . ." The Angel struggled with his query.

"With their guns," gritted the youth, "they took the young men and the maidens, took the store of *manioc* and such dugouts as my people had."

"Took them where and for what?" asked the Cavender, knowing full well what the answer would be.

"All were taken up the River of Death to Bobada. The youths are to labor in digging out the treasure, the maidens to wait upon the dogs. All of them will die—my brother and two sisters with them . . ."

Stoic that he was, Tuweha's voice broke. His shoulders sagged.

The Cavender's grin was ghastly. White teeth showed through lips distorted with insect venom. This new outrage of fiends in human form but added fuel to the fires of hate that roared in his breast. Quickly he considered.

Only five of the treacherous crew of the *Terrapin* to cope with. Storm or murderous mates had done for the rest. The hand of fate was plainly etched in the picture; the odds were even . . .

"WHY do you think all will die!" he asked the Indian.

"El Bruto—the Beast!" stammered the youth, eyes rolling in the terror that Bobada had come to hold for the river natives. "No white man has ever come down the Rio Muerte; many have paddled up it. No Indian has gone there in search of the *ulle* rubber that grows so well on the upper river and has come back save with a mist upon the brain. It is a place accursed for man, Señor. All will die."

"Tommyrot!" Jord Cavender spat. "Tell the old chief yonder that I will go to Bobada and bring him back his sons and daughters. We'll explode this myth, Tuweha. As for Pelaez, the *salinero*, and the five whites from the *Terrapin*, I think they will see *El Bruto* . . . yes, and die too, perhaps. What manner of beast is *El Bruto?*"

"Quien sabe—who knows?" sighed the native, shaking his head as he harkened to the rising notes of the death chant from the chief's dwelling.

Swiftly he conveyed the American's boast to the tribal patriarch. The old man's eyes lighted as he surveyed the Angel's brawn, his heavy pistols, the smile of him. Painfully he rose, hobbled to a hut, returned with a brimming gourd of liquor.

"A magic drink," translated Tuweha. "It will give you strength to fight against *El Bruto.*"

And the pusher downed the full measure of sour, nauseous *caraca*, fermented juice of the palm.

"Fine!" he grinned, shuddering. "Best to take a long shot yourself, hombre. We're wasting time. Let's get going.

"Nada! Tuweha is young and finds life good. No dips no paddle in the River of Death. The Señor from the great America of the North must go alone from here."

The Angel gritted a mirthless laugh, nodded, hitched up his gun belts.

"Bueno!" he smiled. The grimace scoured the Toonglas like a whiplash, mocked him, shamed him. *"Gracias*—thanks for the canoe. If I don't bring it back, the *Terrapin* is yours, *sabe?* Fair trade, eh, amigo? A power schooner for a damn piece of bark?"

HE did not tarry. Time pressing and he was eager to wind up the affair. With long strides he gained the *pitpan*, chuckling softly, disappointed, hurt.

He might have known that the Toonglas would prove craven in the pinch.

That wicked-looking spear, those poisoned arrows might have made the difference between success and failure.

He launched the craft, leaped in. He poised the paddle, but held the stroke as a stirring cry burst from the Indian youth. Into the bay Tuweha waded to the very gunwale of the *pitpan.*

"A minute, Señor!" And then he was embarrassed like a child that has ventured beyond his depth. "You are brave, like a god. You fear nothing, yet you are as a little child in the jungle. I am afraid, terribly afraid, Señor, yet to me the jungle has no secrets.

"Were you to go alone, you would never reach Bobada. I will take you there, but will be crazed with fear when we arrive near *El Bruto.* Unless you can kill the Beast with your magic, we will both perish. God go with us!"

And then he was in his place in the canoe. With measured stroke they drove the trim craft northward into the gloomy sweep of Rio Muerte.

CHAPTER VII

BOBADA!

WERE it not for its sinister record, Rio Muerte—the River of Death — would still be well-named. Crooked, stagnant, a mere sewer of leprous ooze, it wriggles its sinuous way through festering jungle bottoms and loses itself at last in the more vivacious current of the Segovia.

Beneath its sluggish breast of decaying slime thrives all that is evil in the tropics. Deadly miasmas lurk there. In the stinking mist that clings close to its gangrenous bosom is the very breath of death itself. Fat rodents splash along its bilious borders, food for those great serpents, the *culebra de agua,* the *tomaga* and the dread *bolpochi.*

Into this reeking hell Jord Cavender and Tuweha steered, keeping to a narrow canal where the only current worthy the name inched seaward. Always before them were waving borders of suspiciously moving gamalote grass and reeds—movements that betrayed schools of flesh-eating fish, huge varicolored lizards and log-like saurians that sunk beneath the mire at the approach of flashing paddles.

The birds, the monkeys, the gorgeous butterflies, all the happy creatures of the jungle had abandoned the place to slinking shapes that spawn along its pestilential borders, that grow fat in tepid water untouched by healing rays of sunlight.

An utterly evil thing was Rio Muerte, diseased, reeking with the menace of things accursed, feverish . . . a place untenable for man, be he white or brown, a place faced by Tuweha with fear and trembling, by Jord Cavender with a laugh upon his lips, a trust to keep, a score to settle.

Five nights, five days upon that watery trail, threading the tortuous, hidden passages only by the inherent skill of the native youth, Tuweha. They had rain water to drink, dried tapir meat to nibble upon. There was no time to eat, to rest. They slept in the canoe, tortured by mosquito swarms, by the sting of countless bites of sand fly and ticks, by the doleful notes of the red howler monkey from afar.

Why weary you with the details? There was a continual sameness to the passing hours, yet each turn ahead promised startling developments—terrors that failed to materialize.

But all things come to an end. At last they shot their craft onto a clean lagoon—a place devoid of slime, bordered by clean turtle banks of white sand. Even the air was clean, the stench gone. And here the waterway appeared to end in the face of a low hill that rose before them, a gentle rise shrouded in deep and verdant thickets.

It was a wearied pair that beached their craft to peer into a yawning, gurgling hole from which the Rio Muerte debouched. At their feet were remains of a camp that had not been

long broken, of scattered embers of many fires, of rude reed leantos used for shelter.

This was Bobada! Where was the Beast? What had become of the mutineers and their captive Indians?

TUWEHA shuddered at the fetid breath that floated from the maw of the cavern. The Cavender laughed, a trifle wildly. He brushed a swollen hand across eyes that blurred strangely, that saw double images.

"These are the caves of Bobada?" he queried in hollow, haunting tones and the native suddenly noted that the big American was gaunt and yellowed by fever.

"Las Cuevas, yes," echoed the awed Toonglas in hushed whisper. *"Dios,* it is bad. Let us leave this accursed spot. The Beast has gorged upon them whom you seek, has already drunk the blood of my tribesmen. Let us go now while there is still time to escape."

"Ho, ho, ha, ha, ha!" laughed the Angel crazily. "Think you he ate the canoes, the dugouts, the guns, you fool? *Nada!* They are even now in the cavern digging for treasure, the gold of the Spaniards. I am suddenly very tired; we will rest here a while; then follow them."

He slid limply to the sand, relaxed. It was Tuweha's mad shriek that warned him, that caused him to flatten, that saved him from the whirring machete that rocketed from the bush. By inches only, it missed his head, hurtled end over end across the wet sand to bury itself in the Rio Muerte.

Jord Cavender's laugh was noiseless, yet lethal with venom. He rolled to his knees, fingers trembling at the triggers of his guns. The dart of a moving body in the bordering scrub drew his fire. Roar of his guns gave to a high-pitched shriek, strange maledictions with a flavor of English. Chilling laughter came from a bearded face contorted in awful fury and peering between trembling hands raised in surrender.

"Come out, you bloody old assassin!" rasped the Angel, trigger fingers tense as he motioned the ancient out of the jungle. "Fast, or I'll hurry you along with these pretty little smoke tools. Jump, if you understand United States; if not I reckon you savvy the roar of a .45!"

"Fool!" The word crackled from the thickets like a rifle shot, drifted off in dry, mirthless chuckles. "More fools come seeking gold and . . . death."

WARPED, twisted, broken, a gray and filthy gnome hobbled into the open on shapeless boles that had once been legs. His leathery, hoar-whiskered face, yellow with numberless fevers, was deep-stamped with rancor and predatory lust. Sunken eyes burned fiercely from beneath bushy brows. Under a pitted, hawk-like nose leered twisted lips that, parting, revealed ugly, stained fangs.

Awkwardly, yet swiftly, he stumped forward. He rubbed a bullet-seared shoulder with a bony, hawk-like talon.

"Fools! Swine!" he hissed. "You shot me! For that you shall die swiftly, silently, like the lightning bolt kills. Had you killed me your death would have been slow . . . slow, with the flesh being stripped from your bones."

At Jord Cavender's slow smile the gnome went berserk.

"You doubt me?" he shrieked. "Gold-loving fool, you shall see!"

To his lips went the conch that hung from his shoulder and the silent spot echoed to long, mournful blasts. Strangely affected by the piercing sounds, Jord Cavender found his feet, gripped his guns, waited. Tuweha shuddered in the grip of fear, cowered, prayed to the wild gods of his forebears.

The air was still, dead, heavy with portent of rain. Yet through its stagnation knifed a sweetish, vanilla-like odor that stirred the gorge, that sickened. The Angel sniffed suspiciously, eyes hard, pistols bearing on this strange re-

cluse of the jungle. The silence was suddenly oppressive, broken only by gloating chuckles of the gnome as he sneered at them, stroking the baggy sleeves of his ulle-fibre garment.

Tense as a fiddle string at some unvoiced warning in the situation, the big pusher inched toward the cowering native, nudged him.

"*Cuidado*—be careful!" he muttered, guardedly. "This is not *El Bruto,* but an old devil who's up to some infernal monkey business. Get yourself together, bow. String your bow and fit an arrow, *pronto.*"

Reassured at the white man's composure, his poise, Tuweha hastened to obey. Even as he fitted dart to bowstring, he scented that sickening reek. He stepped gingerly into the canoe, peering anxiously about him. His murmured "Toboba! toboba!" went unheeded by the Cavender as a sound percolated from the jungle that sent tremors chasing up his spine.

What was that whisper-like murmur from afar? What was the stealthy patter as of naked feet slithering swiftly across the mouldy jungle floor? What was that growing snarl that chilled the blood—snarl of an oncoming terror that paused at the jungle edge before showing himself?

The recluse laughed wildly; from his lips came a soft clucking.

A TAWNY head nosed forward, eyes blazing, ears laid back, fangs bared. Followed then a twitching black cape, a lean muscular semi-striped body, a nervous whip-like tail. *El Tigre,* the jaguar! King of the Nicaraguan jungles! And not one but numbers of them. Great black and yellow toms bellied forward as they stalked these strangers who had dared set foot in Bobada.

Wary, unafraid, teeth bared in his fighting grin, the Angel backed with weaving guns until the Rio Muerte lapped his feet. Then as the muzzles of his weapons swung in silent arcs that measured the advancing feline ring, as his fingers tightened upon the triggers; even as Tuweha's bow string grew taut, the great cats were suddenly craven at a crackling order from the old man of the jungle.

Restless, hesitant, they wheeled, some fawning at his feet, some crouched with lashing tails. Then at the gnome's low-voiced command, they suddenly bounded into their jungle covert, melted into the gloom, hissing, miauling.

Sneering, nauseated at the overpowering smell of vanilla, Jord Cavender pouched his weapons, snarled at the twin image of the hermit, figment of his aberrated vision.

"Beast of Bobada, eh? You've reigned long here, old man, but it's ended right now. Beast of Bobada! Man-eating *El Bruto!* Just a mad hermit and a pack of man-eating *tigres.* Bah!"

A passion of maniacal laughter swept the gnome.

"Beast of Bobada!" he screamed in awful mirth. "There have been many such, but all are dead . . . dead! All save the six who are in the caves with their Indians, and now you. All who see the treasure of Mondragon are beasts, accursed! See these twisted arms? See this scarred and pitted face? The beasts broke my bones, burned me with hot embers, fed me to the fire ants to learn of the treasure, to wring the truth from me.

"All it brought them was death; and I live after them. You too shall die, white man! The Indian I shall spare and those others in the cavern, for they are but children who obey the beasts who dominate them."

JORD CAVENDER'S face went gray.

"Tom Cavender!" he queried stiffy. "You . . . you killed him too?"

"Tom Cavender?" the grizzled ancient mumbled the name, pulled reflectively at his whiskers as a wild light flamed in his mad eyes. "Gone! Dead as yonder ashes! Buried deeper than

man can dig! Yah-hah-hah-hee-ha—a—ah!"

His ghastly cackle woke strange echoes and Jord Cavender suddenly knew him for a dangerous and gruesome madman. A killing rage burned in the heart of the big tool-pusher. Face set, he leaped toward the recluse.

"Say your prayers, you miserable wretch!" he gritted, reaching for the confessed murderer who cringed, cowered, threw up protesting hands. "For you go to join Tom Cavender; you die as surely . . ."

He was unable to finish his threat, impotent to seize the old man as a wave of sweet vanilla stung his nostrils, engulfed him. The Angel staggered backward, gasping for breath, shuddering, shaken. The gnome laughed softly, stroked those deep sleeves.

"Foul, stinking murderer!" The Angel's grimace was deadly as he unsheathed a gun, motioned the scoffing maniac into the canoe. "I came here to kill you, and kill you I will. But first I will use you. Into that canoe and paddle us into the cavern. There I will settle with the dogs that robbed me.

"After that you will show me where you and your damn tigers killed Tom Cavender. There you too will die to settle the score. Move, you devil, or I'll cut you down where you stand."

His gun thundered, kicking sand at the very feet of the misshapen creature who scuttled to the light craft, silenced, sobered, fearful. As he lifted elephantine feet over the wale he voiced a query pregnant with mixed wonder and astonishment:

"You do not come like these others . . . the beasts? You do not come seeking treasure?"

"Treasure hell!" Jord Cavender brushed dizzily at his eyes. "I came to kill the murderer of Tom Cavender—the Beast of Bobada. That means you!"

Strange disbelief shone in the gnome's evil face.

"All others have been cowards," he muttered. "You are brave. They were mad for gold, while you seek but vengeance. Perhaps . . . perhaps I shall not kill you as I have the others, the beasts."

Shaking a hoary head as though deeply puzzled, he caught up the paddle of the shrinking native. The *pitpan* shot into the dark cavern of Bobada with strokes that proclaimed the man's strength that of a maniac.

CHAPTER VIII

RETRIBUTION

FOUR hours they wormed through the gloomy, vaulted cavity, silent save for a madman's fitful muttering, the plash of his tireless paddle, his occasional dry laughter, choking, ghastly, thrown back from ghostly hemming stalagmites in eerie cadence. Blackness of the pit graded up to mysterious light streaking in from unknown sources. Muffled whisper of distant cataracts came tremulous, ethereal. Nauseous stench arose from the recluse. Frightened moan of the Toonglas never ceased.

Then the hermit had stopped paddling to address the drowsing Cavender, whose head buzzed strangely.

"We near them!" he whispered hoarsely. "Five whites and a *mestizo* with many Indians who tremble with fear. I have watched them in their camp. The whites abuse their natives. They have women. Bah! Filthy dogs, beasts! They are unclean and I will chasten them."

Again he shot the canoe upstream. Daylight loomed ahead, revealed a narrow white beach where six *batto* dugouts were pulled high. Here the ancient beached the *pitpan* above the shore eddies and the three stepped out.

Before them was a circular amphitheatre, open to the burnished sky. At the far side of the giant shaft were moving figures that delved, figures that were moving earth with crude native tools.

"See!" whispered the hermit, leveling

a twisted finger. "The beasts drive their slaves when they should be praying to their gods to save them. Stand you here and watch. Watch how beasts die at Bobada."

Then he had left them and was hobbling ahead, moving with surprising swiftness into the column of light that blazed from above. The Angel and the native youth stood in the gloom as they had been bidden, each from different motives.

Tuweha, sick with fear, trembled at the exotic reek that charged the air, muttered continually, "toboba . . . toboba!" words that meant less than nothing to Jord Cavender. The Toonglas was content to remain behind that strange, grizzled creature whom, he was convinced, was the dread Beast of Bobada.

The Angel grinned maddeningly at the picture his throbbing brain drew of the recluse at grips with the hated mutineers. The show promised satisfaction for the fierce craving in his breast, a craving he seemingly could not indulge because of the strange lassitude that possessed him.

SO he dug at his throbbing temples and watched the gnome emerge into the sunlight, watched bearded Shark Donlin stride out to meet him with the burly Nova Scotian, Hayden, dogging his heels.

"Fools!"

The madman's shrill laugh was taunting, bitter, as he halted. He toyed with his deep sleeves, petting, stroking.

"Fools! Imbeciles, to dig where there is nothing."

Donlin's Celtic ire rose.

"Who the hell are you?" he grated.

Again that choking, sibilant laugh lifted.

"Who else would I be but the ghost of Diego Mondragon; a ghost that guards the treasure from such as you."

"Mondragon, me eye!" roared the mutinous mate of the *Terrapin*. "Better pin up that loose lip o' yours, fellah, or yer name'll be mud. An' that's gospel. Maybe ye know where that gold an' them green stones is at."

"Why shouldn't I, fool?" baited the smirking recluse.

Donlin's hands clenched. His eyes narrowed.

"Where?"

"Ask me, dog."

As the hawk pounces upon the timid sparrow, so the Shark leaped upon the hermit. He seized him with grip of iron, struck and shook him until his jaws rattled. Then as suddenly he released him, staggered backward clutching crazily at his face.

"Gawd!" he blurted. "He stuck me with somethin'. The ol' duffer stuck . . . stuck . . . me. He . . ."

The heavy blood pounding in his face seemed to turn black; his eyes bulged ludicrously; his croak trailed off into a gaspy whisper. He fell. Wide-eyed, the big herring-choker rushed to his side, clawing out a pistol.

"Wassa matter, Shark?" he bleated, half-frightened at the suddenness of the mate's collapse. "What'd he do to yer? What'd the ol' wart come at yer?"

Receiving no answer, realizing that Donlin was dying if not already dead, Hayden straightened. He glared murderously at the strange old man of the jungle whose grin was bitter, flawed, like a sudden rent in cold granite.

"Whatin'ell did yer do to 'im, w'iskers? W'yin'ell do yer come in 'ere an' 'it ol' Shark, eh?"

HAYDEN'S pistol menaced the madman, who weaved upon his tree-stump legs, stroked his sleeves. From deep in his beard came a laugh, low, vibrant, pregnant with the threat of things that creep in the night, and slay. He laughed at the puzzled Nova Scotian, laughed in his gaping face, a sound utterly without joy, stamped with the imprint of unutterable hate.

"The beast handled me," he hissed, venomously. "He is dead. Dead; do you understand? So you shall die, and these others also. So shall all filthy dogs

die that come to Bobada seeking a blood-stained treasure."

"Die?" quizzed the burly Hayden, bridling. "Who? Me?"

Spewing vicious curses he leaped forward, huge fist driving out like a pumping piston. The gnome, staggered by crushing blows, reeled backward. He kept his balance, filled the air with shrill peals of maniacal mirth as he watched Hayden recoil, tearing at his thick wrist, rubbing, peering.

"Damn yer! Damn yer!" he cried wildly. "Yer stuck me too. I'm the last 'un ye'll ever stick . . . the last ye'll stick!"

Desperately he strove to target upon the broad form of the grinning recluse, already blurring before his eyes. Strength poured from him as water from a shattered *olla*. Paralysis gripped him; his eyes glazed.

Swiftly the insidious magic of the mad jungle wizard got in its lethal work. Slowly the Nova Scotian sank with buckling knees; he hit the ground in the rigors of death, twitching horribly.

AT first glimpse of the bearded ancient, the laboring Toonglas youths and maidens dropped their spades of fire-hardened *carboncillo,* clustered fearfully. And the tough, tapir-hide whips of Mono, the Brazilian, Frenchy Le Duc, and the giant Ketner lashed out to bite deep in human tissues, to drink blood.

Their curses scattered the natives, drove them again to their onerous task. Men and women alike prayed audibly, gazed fearfully at the inexplicable passing of beasts they hated, at the avenging hand of the Beast they had been taught to fear.

The hard-souled trio of mutineers turned from their scourging to witness Shark Donlin huddled upon the ground and Hayden slipping to his knees. Sudden amazement gave way to an insane rage to destroy him who had done this thing. With cries of rage they leaped forward. A rifle cracked . . . two more! The crazed hermit tumbled to earth at the first report, hammered down by leaden darts.

The sequence to this action was immeasurably swift, dynamic. From the gloom where two pairs of eyes missed no movement of the unfolding drama, Tuweha saw the flicking lashes take toll of blood of his blood.

Gone then was his fear, his trembling. In his slender breast flamed the courage of savage Carib forebears; his piercing battle cry lifted and was thrown back from beetling cavern walls as he darted forward. He debouched into the light, fitted a poisoned dart to the bowstring.

"Tuweha! Come back . . . you fool!"

Jord Cavender's roared protest went unheeded and he loped after the racing Indian in giant strides.

From a position slightly aloof, sinister Sal Pelaez, the *salinero* of the Cape, had been standing, rifle in hand, calculating upon a project that loomed rosier each time he turned it over in his evil brain.

These renegade companions of his he had come to hate with all the rancor the *mestizo* bears the degenerate white. Yet he was fully sold on Donlin's judgment that the treasure of Mondragon would be uncovered here where ancient Conquistadore bones gleamed white.

That being true, why should he, Pelaez, be content with a sixth share? What more natural than that he alone should return to the Cape with untold wealth, with a harrowing tale of escape from the Beast that had devoured his companions?

And deep was his satisfaction, hearty his laugh, certain his mind that fate was his ally, when he saw the bewhiskered stranger arrive, watched him destroy Shark Donlin and Hayden in his turn. And Pelaez it was of all those in the bowl who heard Tuweha's battle cry, saw the lad charge into the light, armed.

THE bounding apparition startled the *mestizo,* caused him instinctively to throw his rifle to his shoulder. He

beaded upon the flying Indian, flexed his trigger finger; then relaxed, chuckling.

Why shoot a fool native racing with drawn bow, racing to his death? Let the melee become general; let the hated whites, the low Toonglas destroy each other. Out of the shambles Pelaez would emerge with treasure, with added prestige.

But the *salinero* reckoned without the hawk-like eyes of Tuweha. Seeing the glint of the *mestizo's* rifle as it flashed to his shoulder, the youth changed direction. He recognized the thick-set form of the hated bully who had refused the Tooglas salt, who was responsible for the loot of the Rio Muerte tribesmen.

In full stride, he launched the arrow, sent it whirring with the accuracy for which the river natives are famed. And deep that arrow buried itself in the fleshly shoulder of the smirking salt baron.

When a dark man pales he turns a dirty yellow. Such was the color of Pelaez as he jerked the barbed dart from his flesh. One glance at its point and he howled in a paroxysm of fear—fear of the death he knew he could not now escape. For there is no recovery from the seeping virus of the *manchineel.*

Fear paralysis translated itself into lethal action. Twice the *salinero's* rifle thundered before he dropped the charging Toonglas with a shattered hip.

For only an instant was the youth down. Then like a crippled tiger he was hopping ahead, dragging his shattered limb, his long *ullero's* knife gleaming dully in the reflected light.

Threading the hail of the *mestizo's* lead, he closed with his hated enemy. He took a blow from a clubbed gun that crushed his skull like an eggshell, sank his knife to the hilt in the *salinero's* breast as he fell.

ROARING hoarsely, Jord Cavender swept after the leaping Toonglas youth. He saw the crazed hermit shot down, witnessed the quick destruction of Tuweha, of Pelaez. Before him was a huddle of fear-crazed natives; yes, and three of the *Terrapin's* crew bearing down upon him with savage roars, with spitting guns. A curtain of blinding red suffused the Angel's brain, drove him berserk.

By instinct alone he filled his hands, unleashed a tattoo of gunfire as he charged them. And the roar of guns hardly served to dwarf his savage laughter. The man's crazed charge, the crimson blaze from avenging muzzles, the sudden wilting of the giant Ketner, gave the squat Le Duc, the wiry Mono pause.

Like an avenging spirit the Cavender drove at them, guns singing their lethal arias. The smoke-filled music failed to still the wild shrilling, the battle hymn of the stricken jungle hermit.

The Angel was upon the two remaining mutineers before they could organize to stop him. Faces blanching as they sensed their doom, they fell back before that relentless advance, praying, murmuring. They recognized him.

"Angel Cavender!" they breathed. "Devil!"

Desperately they fired at him, Mausers at hips. Swiftly they racked the rifle bolts, firing again and again, without aim, without result. That leaping, plunging demon was there before them, coming ever closer . . . closer.

Lead from the Angel's guns tore the rifle from Le Duc's hands. He raised his hands in abject surrender even as a second slug tunneled his yellow heart, tumbling him a shapeless huddle in the volcanic ash.

The fearful Toonglas tribesmen cowered. They prayed for mercy from the ire of this beast, more destructive, more terrible even that the storied monster that sated his hunger with the bodies of men.

The hellish turmoil of gunfire was stilled. A double *click* told of empty pistols, of an empty Mauser. There was no time to reload. Brain afire, wild

metallic laughter boiling from between twisted lips, Jord Cavender hurled aside his useless weapons, ripped forward with clenching fingers. . . .

The Brazilian's knife, hungry for blood, leaped out to sate its lust in the meaty bulge of the Angel's shoulder. He took the cold steel without flinching — this Cavender — pulled it forth, laughed at the gushing gore. And in that acrid laugh the Mono tasted death. In a single bound the big American had him, lifted him aloft, tore him apart, even as a willow withe is rent.

Bawling, panic-stricken, the Toonglas natives bolted, stampeded in a mad dash to their waiting dugouts. Desperate paddles catapulted the unwieldy boats down the River of Death. The Mono's death shriek rang in their ears and Jord Cavender's hoarse, triumphant paean shrilled high:

"I killed the cock-eyed cathead with my bare hands!"

AS though in a dream, the Angel stared at the quivering thing that had been the man Mono. He shuddered, passed a hand wearily across his beaded brow.

Then he turned to the moaning gnome. He knelt at the man's side, rose suddenly as a wave of sweet vanilla struck his nostrils. A vagrant movement took his eye, caused him to leap aside to barely escape the slashing stroke of a slender, triangular head that darted from the hermit's sleeve.

And then he remembered Tuweha's muttered, "toboba!" He recalled the aimless yarning of a beach rat anent the toboba, most venomous of tropical reptiles. Hardly two feet long, chocolate brown with pale drab stripes, the eel-like creative wriggled from that *ulle* garment, hissing, striking.

Nauseated at the vanilla-like reek of the snake, trembling with rage, the Angel snatched up the rifle of the dead Ketner. He beat out the serpent's life, hurled the writhing flesh afar off with the muzzle as a catapult. Then he was at the side of the wounded madman again, examining his wounds, harkening with growing wonder at the disjointed mutterings of the man.

". . . it's your treasure, Tom Cavender. God knows you went through hell for it. Take what is yours . . . leave the jungle forever. Good God! The brain grows dim . . . dim. This accursed *elephantiasis*. . . . Too late. . . . Gone native. Too late . . . too late!"

The Angel started, stared unbelievably at this filthy, broken creature whose eyes were even now glazing, whose wounds were lethal. Softly, reverently, he shook him.

"Before God, man, are you Tom Cavender?" he cried. "Speak, do you hear?"

The recluse rallied, shook himself, smiled foolishly.

"Of course I'm Tom Cavender," he said wearily. "Who are you? Has the jungle got you, too?"

"DAD! Dad!" Jord Cavender groaned. "What happened . . . tell me?"

"Happened?" A puzzled look chased across the gnome's face. "Why, everything happened all at once, seemed like. That's the way it is in the jungle; when it rains it pours. Hah-hoh-hoh-hee-hee-ee!

"First the red monkey bit me and my brain went hazy. Then the Caribisi killed the fool who dug up Mondragon's treasure just as they killed everyone who ever came looking for it, except me. The sun went black the day I came, so they let me live and I took one of their women; became one of them.

"The blacks wouldn't touch the treasure, so I took it. It's mine, do you hear? Mine, mine. Then came the *viruelas,* the smallpox. It took the Caribisi, every man, woman and child. I took it, but got well. Then I took this elephant foot. That finished me. I had to stay. Yes, everything happened . . . fast!"

"Then the Caribisi were the killers,

what men call the Beast of Bobada?"

The hermit's laugh was low, weak.

"Until they died . . . yes. Then came the real beasts—seeking treasure. They tortured me, broke my bones, burned me. Damn their filthy souls to hell! But the toboba, ah, the toboba made the difference.

"They that laid hands on me died, as you have seen. They that sought to take me from my hut in the bush died under the fangs of my tigers. I learned to handle the toboba—a trick of the Caribisi. And the tigers, yes, and all jungle creatures are craven when they scent the reek of the snake."

A rush of blood choked him. He coughed, gripped the arm of the younger man as though by sheer force to hold himself to things earthly.

"The treasure!" he gasped, pointing down the Rio Muerte. "Yellow gold from the Poteca . . . green stones from the Magdelena . . . yours . . . under the tiger den at my hut."

He struggled for breath, head lolling crazily. Desperately he strove to hold the spirit, failed as the death rattle lifted from a blood-filled throat. The Beast of Bobada was dead and night fell with a suddenness typical of jungle happenings.

CHAPTER IX

INTO THE LIGHT

THE outlands of the Segovia echoed to the moan of conches.

Swiftly the jungle telegraph relayed the word to the outposts of civilization that the Beast of Bobada was dead.

And in the course of time, this jungle rumor, exaggerated, amplified, reached the ear of the *Commandante* of Gracias à Dios, at the Cape. Thus it was that when the drifting vessel was actually sighted on the lower river, the official sent a boatload of soldiers out to intercept it. And it was not entirely by chance that Gringo Jack happened to be at that particular place at that particular time.

The soldiers swarmed up the rusty side of the *Terrapin* to face a wild-looking giant who leered down at them from the dinky bridge. Dead eyes stared from out a fever-blistered skull; cracked lips curled in a mirthless grimace.

Naked he was save for a frayed remnant of a borrowed shirt that clung about his shrunken neck. He was covered with a multitude of deep lacerations, raw, pus-filled channels where the razor-like claws of tiger-cats had scored. One arm hung helpless from a fearfully infected knife thrust in the shoulder. Hair and beard were blood-caked.

And yet it took them all, soldiers, native paddlers—yes, and Gringo Jack himself—to subdue this *loco,* to separate him from an ancient sea chest of gold and emeralds with which he toyed. And but for the friendly grog shop keeper who recognized him, they would have brained him for his madness and thrown him to the crocodiles.

And when the first steamer touched at the Cape, it was Gringo Jack who sent him back to "God's country," back to his whirling drills, back to the things that can be bought with treasure from the Spanish Main.

Should you meet Jord Cavender one of these days and wonder perhaps why the man is sober, unsmiling, in this yarn then will you have your answer. The Angel's smile is gone forever along with his fetish—a tiny urn of ash. Both are buried with the Beast in a shallow grave at Bobada.

Then again, should you touch at Gracias à Dios on your tropic wanderings, think of this yarn when it strikes you as strange that a wizened reprobate who runs a grog shop of ill repute should own a battered though serviceable power schooner that makes regular trading trips up and down the swirling Segovia.

THE END

Complete Western Novelet

FREE RANGE

By WALT COBURN

Author of "Outlaw," "Code of the Mounted," etc.

Tom Devlin greenhorned into Yaqui Land. The giant Nono, thirst-mad for gringo blood, rallied his hordes—for a lesson in six-gun war.

FROM start to finish, it was one of those things that could happen nowhere but down there in Mexico. Nor could it have happened to hardly anyone except Tom Devlin. There is plenty to smile at, down across the border. Yes, and there are things which happen down there that will chill a man's blood on the hottest day of the hottest summer Sonora ever saw.

Ask any cowman who has been there long, running cattle on the fringe of those mountains where the Yaquis live. There are Yaquis who have never acknowledged allegiance to any man save a Yaqui chief. With them live the remnants of the few Chiricahua Apaches who never surrendered to the United States.

Fighting men? Warriors? Ask Mexico. Ask some old officer of cavalry who knew the Apache Kid's history. Ask a Sonora Mexican what he'll take to help you move a bunch of cattle across the Yaqui country into Chihuahua.

Dangerous country? There will be more than a day in a cowman's year, down there, when he will know that feeling of utter helplessness and fear as he plays host to some uninvited guests who usually eat their fill, then pass along.

But once in a very great while they exact bigger toll—fresh horses, some fat cattle, a man's life. And there is nothing that Mexico or the United States can do about it except swap a few letters of apology and indignation which are filed away to gather dust.

SHEEP and the dry land farmers had driven big Tom Devlin from Montana. You need plenty of unfenced range to make money in the cattle business.

Devlin drifted south with a fat bank balance and the first few white hairs sprinkling the thick, black hair at his temples. He'd gotten a fair price for his Montana outfit that his father had located in '68. He could sit back and live in comfort for the rest of his life.

Following the trail blazed by other Montana folks, Devlin pulled out for California. There he spent a winter in a San Diego hotel. Most of his days were idled away down at the docks, where he would sit and smoke hand-made cigarets and talk to the sailors and old codgers that fished from morning until supper time.

White collars rubbed his neck raw. His bowed legs couldn't stand right to hit a golf ball. Now and then, on very rare occasions, he ran into some man who spoke his own language and they would talk cows and horses and cuss sheep and nesters and usually wind up by getting drunk and singing "Sam Bass" or the "Lament."

With the Spring, Devlin got to taking his old chaps and boots and saddle out of the clothes closet. He'd sit on the edge of his bed and fool with the hard twist catch-rope that he'd kept for a relic. There was a boy's wistfulness in his puckered blue eyes. And one day he checked out of the big hotel and bought a ticket for Globe, Arizona. Somebody had written Devlin a letter telling him about an outfit over there that could be picked up cheap.

The grin came back to his wide mouth when he threw his saddle on a horse and rode out to look at the outfit. In a few months the sun had colored his face with a dark tan. The wistfulness was gone from his eyes.

There followed eight years of hard work that made a man cuss and grin and sweat and freeze. Eight years of fair-to middling luck. Tom liked the rough country and the wild cattle.

He liked Arizona better, in lots of ways, than he had liked Montana. A man could wear out a rope down there, gathering wild stuff. And there was not the monotony of the long winters when the cowboy hung up his rope and handled a hay fork until the Chinook melted off the snow in the Spring. He liked these Southwest boys with their drawling humor and their contempt for danger as they matched races with the long-horned renegade steers that made up the remnants of three outfits Devlin had bought for a song.

It was work that kept a man young. What amusement could any city offer that would come up to those evenings when Devlin and his men squatted on their heels around a mesquite fire and swapped yarns and talked over the day's work? They'd took to Tom Devlin just like he'd took to them. And the little bitterness that had pinched his cowman's heart when he had quit Montana, was there no longer.

This was cow country. And any cow country was home to Tom Devlin.

EIGHT years . . . . Tom Devlin owned one of the biggest spreads in Arizona. He thought mebbyso he might git married some day when he had time to look around for the right sort of a woman. Then came the war with Germany.

Most of the cowpunchers joined up. Devlin gave each of them a check for a couple of hundred bucks and told them their jobs would be waiting when they'd hogtied Kaiser Bill and come back with a few scalps to decorate their headstalls with.

He hung up their saddles in the bunkhouse and carried along the work with the help of the old stove-up hands that was too stove-up to be any good at war work. And the campfires at night were damned empty without those boys that had gone off to whup the Kaiser.

Cattle prices soared. Devlin didn't seem to notice. He'd made his. All he wanted was his boys back. He was out in the mountains when a cowboy came with the news of the Armistice. Devlin gathered in his cowpunchers and they took a few days off to celebrate.

Then he began pulling strings to get his cowboys out of the service nad back on the ranch. Devlin had done a lot, in a quiet sort of way, for the government.

He made out a list of his soldier-cowboys and took the train for Washington. Devlin knew a few of the big gents there. They knew of those things Devlin had done, during the long months of the war. And in a month or so after the armistice, Tom Devlin had the bulk of his boys back.

There were some who would spend the time from now on in the government hospitals. It was typical of Tom Devlin that he paid each one of these boys a visit. Nor did it matter a damn to the cowman that they were scattered from New York to California.

It was hell, seeing those boys there in the hospital—boys that had rode Devlin's broncs and roped out Devlin's wild steers for him; boys that took the hard rap with a grin and a careless jest. In their eyes Devlin saw the terrible reflection of the picture of hell that they had watched. . .

Devlin needed all his grit to keep cheerful, like they were, about it. A few weeks or months, a year or so, and they'd be all done suffering. There was nothing that Tom Devlin or any man could do except be as cheerful about it as they were.

There were some who hadn't come back . . . Gold stars . . . Their names chiseled into the granite monument that Devlin wasn't allowed to pay for alone because there were others who had lost and must share in this gesture of respect for their dead.

DEVLIN looked older, somehow, when he got back to the ranch. And it sort of shocked him to find out that those boys who had come back whole could sit around of an evening and josh about it. Then he began to savvy that there was a sort of hysteria in their joshing, a reaction.

They talked about Paris and red wine and the French girls; not about barb-wire entanglements and the screams and groans of dying men and the stench of dead flesh that still hung in their nostrils.

Two or three of the boys would never again be good cowboys. Something was wrong with them, an intangible something that no man could explain. Only those boys who had been there could understand. You can't describe hell with words.

Devlin hated to watch them stare into the firelight. He couldn't find it in his heart to jack them up when they made mistakes. It was like scolding a man who had just come back from hell to stay a while on earth. Devlin was, in some ways, as sensitive as a small boy. Some of the Irish are like that.

Nor did the older hands mind much when Devlin took it out on them. They knew he was working off some sort of poison in his system. They rather liked to hear him cuss.

They tried not to grin when he'd slam his battered hat on the ground and swear that he'd fire the next blankety-blank this-and-thus that spoiled the batter on the next gatherment of boogery steers, and where in hell did they ever git the idea that they was cowpunchers, and that he could take a handful of bartenders, miners and sheepherders and gather more cattle in a week than this outfit of sheep-brained, snail-movin,' horse-killin', loop-spillin', boneheaded, star-gazin', buckboard-ridin' damn fools could round up in a year of blue Mondays.

After a few months, things sort of settled back into the old order. When those returned soldiers began cussing the grub, Tom Devlin heaved a big sigh of relief.

THEN the price of beef cattle dropped out of sight. And along came those years of drouth that sent many a big outfit to the wall. Banks that had always been as solid as the granite boulders in the hills, closed their

doors. Tom Devlin turned over the work to his foreman. He spent a lot of his time in town. Like most big outfits, Devlin ran his spread on borrowed money. It was money that went to pay for more land, more graded bulls, running expenses, new horses and the hundred and one things that it takes to keep an outfit on its feet.

There were notes to pay off. A lot of good cash money had gone when a couple of banks failed. And after three years of hang and rattle, Tom Devlin rode out to the ranch one day with a stranger.

"Boys," he told them, "meet Mr. Patterson. He's the man that'll be signin' your checks from now on. They done closed me out."

Tom Devlin was broke. He'd dropped mighty close to a million dollars. But he still grinned. He was like a man who had been desperately ill for three years and just been discharged from the hospital and allowed to go home to die. But that didn't keep him from grinning.

He could stay on here and run the outfit for the big bank that had taken it over. But Tom Devlin had a lot of pride—pride, and a few thousand dollars.

"Where do you go from here, Tom?" asked somebody.

"Yonderly."

Devlin saddled his pet horse. He stepped up into the saddle and pinched out the coal of his cigaret between gloved thumb and forefinger.

"So-long boys, take care uh yourselves."

"Good luck, Tom!"

They watched him ride away from the ranch. The thick hair under the dusty brim of his hat was more silver than black now. His shoulders were a little stooped, as are the shoulders of most old-time cowmen.

Old? How old was Tom Devlin? How old is any old cowpuncher up till the day he steps down out of the middle of his last horse? On that day he is old, too old to make a hand any longer. But until that day his years don't count.

Tom Devlin pulled off his gloves and rolled a fresh cigaret. His puckered blue eyes were a little misty, but his mouth grinned as he headed southward toward Mexico . . . Mexico, where the range is open and a busted cowman can make his last stand . . . Old Mexico.

CHAPTER II

THE KILLER'S BRAND

UNLESS you lived below the Mexican border you probably never heard of Luis Losaro. Luis was more Yaqui than Mexican in many ways, though he was raised among the Mexicans and his father was a Mexican soldier. Luis stood six feet five in his broad, bare feet, with the knotty muscles of a wrestler and the mind of a child. Luis quit Nogales and ran off to live with the Yaquis.

Maybe you never heard of Luis Losaro, whose cruelty and wanton butchering of livestock and human beings made even the indifferent Mexican officers shudder a little over their drinks.

Mostly, there below the border, he was better known as Nono, which means feeble-minded, or shy. He got the name when he was a small boy, because he always avoided the company of the other half-naked urchins that shared the dust and mud holes and fleas with the skinny dogs and the domesticated wild hogs.

"Nono," they would shrill at him and drive him to hide somewhere.

His was a queer sort of timidness; pitiful, had there been anyone to notice and care. It was a shyness that tied his child's tongue so that no amount of beatings could untie his power of speech.

Be sure that he got his share of beatings—beatings that he bore without a tear or whimper. From babyhood, Nono had never cried. And on several occasions, when older boys taunted him

with that name, he almost killed them with a knife he had stolen somewhere and kept hidden.

There was a story to the effect that, when he was a small baby on the squalid little goat ranch that was his father's, a band of renegade rebels had stopped there. They had mistreated his mother and sisters.

One of them had noticed the baby in its crib made of old boards and a goat pelt. He had picked the infant up by one leg and thrown it against the adobe wall. There was a deep dent in the soft little skull after that and it was generally believed that the blow had unbalanced the child's mind.

Nono must have been about twelve years old when he left home. The morning after he vanished, they found the body of a boy who had been particularly loud in his teasing of the feeble-minded Nono. The head was all but severed from the body, which was hacked almost beyond recognition.

Because the dead boy's father owned a store and was a man of considerable influence, a party of soldiers was sent to fetch back the vanished Nono for questioning and punishment, which would be death.

A mile from town they met an irate white man who bitterly complained of the theft of a race mare that had been tied in the barn to train for a race. Farther on, they came upon a Mexican vaquero who had been sleeping off too much mescal under a mesquite tree. The vaquero bemoaned the loss of his spurs, his saddle, his new *pistola* and a knife. . .

The soldiers came back empty handed, humiliated. A half-witted boy had made them into fools.

For some years, Luis Losaro, better known as Nono, was not heard from. He was almost forgotten, even by his soldier father and his fat mother, who had eleven other children of assorted sizes and ages to make her life a burden.

Then vague reports began to drift across the desert and mesas from the Sierra Madre mountains. There were rumors of a giant half-wit who was a leader among the warlike Yaquis. Cattle were being butchered, horses stolen, women molested or carried away from their homes. A white man was found tortured to death.

Nono, with a giant's build and a dwarfed mind, had come into his own. And may the *Senor Dios* have mercy on his enemies, because they would find none in the heart of Luis Losaro.

WHEN Tom Devlin picked up a thousand-acre lease and a bunch of Mexican cows for a price that made him feel almost guilty, he told himself that he had just naturally stumbled and fallen into a patch of luck. He hadn't heard of Luis Losaro, then. He paid over almost all his money and signed the necessary papers that gave him a ten-year lease on a thousand acres of what was known as the Portales grant.

With the aid of a saloon man and gambler whom he had known in Globe, he managed to procure from the Mexican government a *porte de armas* which permitted him to carry a Colt's single action .45 and a 30-40 Winchester. He picked up a stout mule at a decent price and a smaller mule at a lesser price. He loaded his bed and some grub, and hit the trail for his newly-acquired ranch at the edge of the Sierra Madres.

The very polite and soft-spoken Mexican who had leased him the land and sold him the cattle, bade Tom an affectionate farewell. He pressed upon the American the gift of a dozen bottles of Mazatlan tequila. Devlin left the border with the feeling that he had taken an unfair advantage of that polite-mannered Mexican whose political leanings prevented him from living on his own land.

Some fifteen miles below the line, Devlin encountered his first problem of the many that confront the greenhorn gringo in Mexico.

He was halted at an adobe shack with

barred windows. A non-commissioned officer and a couple of sleepy-looking soldiers were on guard there. The non-com made Devlin understand that he wanted to examine his passport and his *porte de armas.*

Devlin spoke no Mexican and understood but a few words. The non-com was as ignorant of Devlin's language.

Finally Tom Devlin was made to understand that the Mexican wanted ten dollars. After much dickering Devlin settled for five dollars and a bottle of tequila. Save for a little silver, the pocket of Tom Devlin's Levi overalls was empty of money. He tossed the silver to the two sleepy soldiers, tipped his hat in reply to the moon-faced non-com's elaborate salute, and rode on.

He knew that he had been literally held up and robbed, but what was there to do about it? It was too far back to town, where he could report the mercenary non-com. He wondered what would have happened if he had failed to pay toll. Most likely he'd have occupied one of those three cells inside the adobe shack. He'd been warned against having any trouble with the federal soldiers down there.

It hurt Devlin's pride to knuckle down to that fat-faced bum and the two runty soldiers. He could have cleaned up on the three of 'em without half trying.

Well, no use getting up a sweat over it. He'd lost two hours and it was better than a hundred miles to the ranch. He'd gone down there with the very polite Mexican owner in an automobile, over a road that was rough and full of sand traps.

AS he rode along, he pictured the ranch with its low adobe buildings, its fruit trees, its swift-flowing creek that was as clear and cold as a Montana trout stream. It was sure a pretty layout; good grass, plenty of water, fat cattle. And there were more cattle back in the hills that wore no brand and belonged to whoever was cowboy enough to snare 'em.

About twenty head of horses went with the ranch. They weren't much, compared with the steel dust horses Devlin had used in building up his remuda in Arizona, but he reckoned they'd pack a man. And Pronto, the horse that now carried him, could catch a calf right now, in any sort of country. A fast horse, a stout rope and a running iron had started more than one man in the cattle business.

Tom Devlin reckoned he'd make out. Nor did he waste any hours in self-pity. This was cow country and he was a cowman. His bones were all whole, he didn't need specs to read with; he could eat anything and wash it down with black coffee and lay down and sleep like a tired kid.

They might refer to him as Old Man Tom or Old Man Devlin, but he could lead where a hell of a lot of young cowboys wouldn't foller. And he'd never asked any man to let the hammer down on a snuffy horse of a chilly mornin'. He uncocked his own broncs and led his own circles. And so far as range went, the Portales grant beat anything Devlin had ever laid eyes on.

There was a Mexican family at the ranch. Tom Devlin remembered the woman's good cooking. And he'd been assured that he could pick up a few *vaqueros* any time he needed men. Well, he wouldn't need much help handling this little jag of stuff, except to brand up the calves and drive his beef to market.

Later, when he'd got back on his feet, he'd send for some of the boys he'd worked in Arizona. They'd come now, if he'd let 'em, and work without pay till Devlin got to where he could afford to give 'em wages. But Tom Devlin had his pride. He'd rode off before they had a chance to proposition him.

It took him better than two days to make the ranch. It was about noon when he got there.

THEN he learned his second lesson in cow ranching down below the line. The ranch was deserted. That Mexican family had gone, bag and baggage, and it looked like they'd taken five head of the best horses with them. Devlin unloaded the pack mules. He watered Pronto and staked him where the feed was best. Then he lugged his loaded kiack boxes and his bed into the main house.

The house was in a state of disorder. There were overturned tables and broken chairs and dirty tinware dishes. An iron kettle with a handful of sour beans caked in the bottom stood on the stove. Empty bottles were lying around. Cigaret butts littered the hard-packed dirt floor. Flies swarmed on some hunks of half-cooked meat that had been tromped by careless feet.

It took Devlin an hour to clean up the place. It struck him as being kind of odd, this disorder. That Mexican woman had been neat as a pin. Her three young daughters had looked neat and clean enough in their cheap little gingham dresses. And their father and two older brothers had spoken good enough American and didn't look like they'd litter up a place like this.

Devlin lit a cigaret and started on a tour of inspection. He couldn't have explained just why he carried his Winchester with him as he wandered around, peering into the several outbuildings. At the shadowed doorway of a shed that was used as a blacksmith shop, he pulled up with a muttered oath.

Just inside the doorway sprawled the dead body of a man, lying face downward. Devlin stepped inside, a grim set to his jaw. He turned the stiffened body over. He recognized the face of the oldest Mexican boy, who had spoken good American. There were half a dozen bullet wounds in the young *vaquero's* body.

Tom stepped outside and closed the door on the dead man. He felt a little dazed and there was a hollow spot in the pit of his stomach. He went back to the main house and pulled the cork on a bottle of tequila. The peppery drink made him feel a little better. He knew that he needed food, so he opened a can of tomatoes and found some cold biscuits left over from breakfast.

Then he dug a grave and buried the young Mexican. He felt lonely and unnatural and a little jumpy. After a bit he saddled Pronto and took a ride around, looking for sign. He found plenty of tracks; mule tracks and horse tracks. He judged there must have been a dozen in the raiding party.

There was no way of telling what had become of the rest of the family that had been caught there at the ranch. Perhaps the men were dead and the women carried off as prisoners. Devlin had heard about the methods of the renegade raiders. Or it might be that they had escaped.

Devlin rode up on a hogback ridge and carefully scanned the country with his field-glasses. There was not a sign of anyone moving around. A few head of cattle grazed peacefully. A buck deer was coming down to water. A coyote yapped. But there was not a trace of any human thing. And after a time Tom Devlin rode slowly back down the slope to the house.

AS he unsaddled Pronto, Devlin was struck with the sharp realization of his helplessness. He was one man, one white man, one gringo against an uncounted force. Of what value were the puny papers that gave him the right to be here on this land?

He knew of the bitter resentment and the hatred toward the gringo that many of the ignorant peon class fostered in their hearts. He had heard tales of the warlike Yaquis that sounded fictitious because they described methods of cruelty to prisoners that were too horrible for the civilized mind to grasp. He had heard stories of Pancho Villa and other rebel leaders, and he had wondered if Villa and his compatriots had actually been so cold-blooded.

It had seemed hardly reasonable, there across the border, in Arizona, that Mexico was so untamed. But here, alone on the ranch, with a fresh grave to remind him of a man murdered, the perspective changed.

A man could be killed here, and the sun could bleach his bones white before his death was discovered. And what way would there be of ever knowing who had done the killing?

Those hills that formed the background, like an elaborate stage setting for the adobe buildings and the corrals, those hills with their huge boulders and brush and trees could hide a hundred enemies whose black eyes now watched every movement of the hated gringo.

Since he had ridden up to the ranch, driving his laden pack mules, Tom Devlin had felt that he was being watched by hidden eyes. He kept fighting off the impulse to whirl suddenly about in a vain hope of seeing some one.

He wanted to be inside the house, safe from the chance of being shot in the back. He needed all his grit now as he went about picketing Pronto and gathering wood for his supper fire.

He staked Pronto in a little park surrounded by heavy brush. Then he cooked and ate his supper.

The dishes were washed and dried, Devlin painstakingly cached his saddle and most of his grub in a hole he dug. He covered the cache with old dirt and an old goat pelt that had served as a rug on the dirt floor. The fresh dirt that remained was thrown in the fireplace and covered with coals and ashes.

WHEN the short twilight was gone and darkness came, Devlin took his carbine and ammunition and two blankets; went outside. He made his bed in a brush patch he had selected that afternoon when he staked out his horse. From where he spread his blankets, Devlin could reach out and touch the picket pin that anchored Pronto.

Without removing his boots, the cowman lay down. Hidden in the pocket of the black brush, he dozed fitfully. His hand was on his gun.

Thoughts, memories, fears crept into his fitful slumbers. He tried not to regret this final step he had taken. He didn't like to admit that he had dropped his last few dollars into a bog hole of failure. He'd play his string out, that's all. Win, lose or draw, he'd hang and rattle.

If they let him alone down here in Mexico, he'd come out with a stake in a few years. If they killed him off, well, that was the loser's end of it. Part of the chances a man took, almost anywhere he went, was death. In city or little village, on the desert or in the mountains or out at sea. Old Man Death waited to meet every man when the time came for that man to go.

Look how the flu took big, husky men that had never had a sick day in their lives. A man could get snake bit or he might scratch his finger and be dead in a week of blood poison. There were a thousand ways for a man to die. When the Big Boss called his name, he took the long trail; not a second before or later. When a man's time came, he cashed in his chips and quit the game. New York or Sonora, it didn't matter a damn where a man was.

Money? Well, what did money buy a man except more work and worry? Devlin had tackled the soft life and found it harder than the hardest day's work he'd ever done on a cow ranch.

On the range it was beans and beef and bread and coffee, tobacco to smoke, a bed under the stars, a good horse to ride, clean air to breathe, a strong body . . . "and a weak head," grinned Tom Devlin.

He bunched an end of a blanket to make a pillow. He dropped off to sleep. He awoke with the first streak of dawn in the sky, a little startled to find that he had slept at all, surprised, in a mild way, to know that he was alive.

CHAPTER III
PREY FOR THE YAQUIS

GRASS was beginning to cover the fresh dirt that marked the young *vaquero's* grave there behind the blacksmith shop. Tom Devlin was beginning his third month at the Portales grant.

His canned stuff was gone. It was frijole beans and jerky and bread and some spuds and green truck in the little garden. Devlin needed a haircut and a shave and his clothes were in need of a few patches. But he didn't seem to mind.

This was a cowman's paradise. It was a lean day that didn't net him three or four big mavericks. He still slept in the brush within reach of Pronto's picket rope, and in a different spot each night. But a man could git used to anything if he stayed with it long enough.

Now and then he would sight a horsebacker on some ridge or butte. But he never got within hollering distance of those solitary sentinels that were always watching him and his ranch.

He'd had three or four visitors. Mexicans, who spoke but few words of Devlin's language. He treated them to what he had to offer a guest. They always seemed friendly enough, and a little afraid. They never lingered long, there at the ranch. They would motion toward the ragged peaks of the Sierra Madres.

"Yaqui," they would say, fear and respect in their voices. "Nono, Luis Lozaro . . . *Muy loco.*"

They must have thought that the lone gringo was likewise a little loco to stay there where death had visited.

One day, within an hour's ride of the ranch, Tom Devlin came upon that which made him shiver a little, though the sun was hot as a blast furnace. There was a huge ant hill. To four stout pegs were fastened thongs of rawhide that held in shriveled grip the wrist bones and leg bones of what had been a man. Other bones were scattered about, white as chalk . . . Grisly proof of the fate of the Mexican who had lived at the Portales grant.

As Devlin squatted on his heels, examining the bits of bleached bones and shriveled rawhide, one of the huge ants bit him on the hand. It was like the sting of a wasp. Devlin quit the spot, brushing more of the insects from his clothes.

His face was a little white under its deep tan as he rode away from there. And the rest of that day and far into that night, he could not drive from his mind the picture of the horrible death of that man who had been stripped and staked out to die—slowly.

A man less stubbornly courageous would have quit and gone back across the border. But that was not Tom Devlin's way. He would stick it out. When the showdown came he'd fight until they killed him with good, humane bullets.

He wondered sometimes what was holding back the Yaquis. Why didn't they ride down and kill him and be done with it? He didn't know that Nono, the half-witted giant who was more Yaqui than he had ever been Mexican, was over in Chihuahua with a band of his Yaqui raiders. The pickings were better just now, over in Chihuahua.

ANOTHER day Tom Devlin had a little experience that gave him food for thought. He was on his way to the ranch after a day's work in the hills. It was almost sundown.

Riding down a dry wash he came upon a man who lay like a corpse there in the sparse shade of a little juniper. The man was naked except for a faded cotton shirt that had once been pink or red. His body was almost black in color. Because the man was very old, his body was just wrinkled skin that covered marrowless bones. Devlin had

never seen such an old face. The network of wrinkles looked like leather, cracked in the sun.

There was a little water in Devlin's canteen. He got some down the old Yaqui's throat and presently the old Indian opened his eyes. They were redly black, queerly alive in that mummylike setting of wrinkled hide. Those eyes made Devlin instinctively draw back. The Yaqui's toothless, lipless mouth twitched in a grimace of some sort. Devlin fed him the rest of the water.

It was about five miles to the ranch. Devlin got the old man into the saddle and climbed up behind. He had to hold the weakened old body in his arms. Stringy white hair, sparse and yellowing like old ivory, covered a skinny neck that seemed too weak to support the Yaqui's head.

"I bet," Devlin said aloud, "that you're the oldest human on earth."

He got the old Indian to the ranch and fixed him a makeshift bed out under a tree. The old man had feebly protested, with grunts and skinny clawlike hands, against being taken inside the house. Devlin made some strong coffee and a sort of soup. But it was the fiery tequila that seemed to put life into this shriveled old body that was, by some miracle, alive.

"Well, drink hearty, old war hoss." And Devlin grinned when the old Yaqui made feeble signs that he wanted Devlin's cigaret. "Yo're a game old sport. But I wisht yuh'd quit starin' at a man with them eyes."

Perhaps the old Yaqui understood. His horrible old mouth opened and a brittle cackling sound came from the skinny throat. The sound made Devlin jump.

"Damned if I don't think yo're a-hoorawin' me."

Devlin built a fire outside. Somehow he couldn't harden himself to the point of quitting the old fellow, but he didn't relish the idea of sitting there in the dark with him. The cowman had the impression that those fierce old eyes that always watched him could see through the darkness.

Devlin's back was against the adobe wall of the house and he sat with his Winchester across his lap. Across the firelight he could make out the old Yaqui's eyes. They were two red coals that burned against a black skull.

IT had been a hard day. Devlin dozed off.

He awoke with a jerk to blink at the dozen or more ragged, heavily-armed Yaquis who stood around him. None of them spoke. They looked at Devlin without displaying a single emotion of any sort. Their guns were not pointed at him.

Their only concern seemed to be this ageless old mummy who began talking in a cracked, thin voice. They listened intently. Now and then one of them would glance at Devlin, who was now on his feet, the hammer of his Winchester thumbed to full cock.

The old Yaqui ceased speaking. They made a litter of the blanket Devlin had used to cover the old bony body. Four of them carried away the old man. Their companions followed them into the night that swallowed them in its blackness. Devlin was left alone, there in the firelight, with a cocked Winchester in his hand.

It struck him again, that helpless feeling. Here he stood, a plain target for those men hidden by the night. A dozen bullets could knock him down before he could jerk the trigger of his gun. He was wholly at their mercy. And, according to the Mexican belief, mercy was an unknown thing to the Yaqui.

Devlin let the hammer down on his carbine and leaned the weapon against the wall. He made a cigaret and lit it with steady hands. Squatting on his heels, he stared thoughtfully into the fire that was growing feeble.

Tom Devlin was acting out a desperate little bit of drama. As a boy, he

had heard his father, who had been an old Indian fighter, tell tales of the redskins. He knew they respected bravery in an enemy, despised fear and cowardice—Sioux, Apache, Yaqui, all Indians with Indian minds.

Well, if any of them sons uh guns were a-watchin', they wouldn't see Tom Devlin weaken. Mebbyso, if he acted like he didn't much give a damn, one way or another, they'd let him alone.

It may have been that Devlin's line of reasoning was right. At any rate, they did not molest him in any way. If they skulked there in the black shadows, they were careful to make no sound. And when the coals of the fire went black, Devlin picked up his Winchester and spread his blankets in the house for the first time.

"Safer inside," he told himself. "Out yonder in the brush one uh them cat-footed cusses could slip a knife into me and I'd wake up on yonder side uh the Big River."

The next morning, at daybreak, he went to water Pronto. He found nothing but the picket pin. They had stolen the only good horse he owned.

CHAPTER IV
MACHETE LAW

TOM DEVLIN took his catch-rope and a *morral,* or nose-bag, filled with cracked barley. Thus equipped, set out to capture one of the horses in the pasture. Wrangling a big pasture on foot is no easy chore. Nor would any of the wary Mexican horses be baited by the tempting sight of the *morral.*

It took Devlin half the morning to get three of the horses into the corral. He was sweat-soaked, winded, out of patience. His tight-fitting boots had rubbed blisters on his feet.

Thought of the loss of Pronto put him in a fighting temper. Damn 'em, he'd helped that old Yaqui and his kinfolks or friends or whatever they was, and they had stole his only good horse by way of appreciation. You couldn't tell Tom Devlin anything about the honor of a blankety-blank, such-and-such, blanket-wearin', paddle-footed Injun.

Devlin roped out the likeliest one of the sorry horses in the corral. Just about now, he'd he proud to meet up with that very polite jasper that unloaded this suicide spread on him.

Devlin led the horse outside the corral and picked up his bridle. At his first move to slip the headstall over the mouse-colored nose, the animal jerked back and struck with wicked forefeet.

"*Muy bronco,* are yuh? Some soft-tempered bronc-stomper bin whippin' yuh acrost the ears, huh? Well, you rat-colored gruya cross between a jackrabbit and a cyclone, yo're the first one uh this undersized hoss cavvy that's showed enough ambition tuh switch off a fly. We may go round an' round, gruya, but I ain't a hoss whupper and I ain't gonna fight yuh. And don't go tryin' tuh slap this cigaret outa my mouth. Easy, gruya, ol' warthog, easy."

Gentling the mouse-colored pony took Devlin's mind off his troubles. He liked to handle a green horse. And after half an hour of coaxing and dodging the wicked hoofs, he managed to get a hackamore on the pony's head.

Dusty, sweat dripping like water off his red face, Devlin stepped back, holding to the hackamore rope. He found tobacco and papers and was building a cigaret when he noticed, for the first time, that he was not alone.

There in the shadow of an adobe shed stood a man, the biggest, ugliest man Tom Devlin had ever looked at. Six and a half feet tall, naked save for a breech clout and the several filled cartridge belts that crossed his huge chest and circled his middle.

His body, burned almost black by wind and sun, was greasy and sweaty and glistened like tarnished copper in the sunlight. Above the hairless body

was a face of apelike structure. Gleaming teeth showed behind lips that hung loosely, slavering like a dog's. He had a broad, flat nose with red nostrils.

Beady, red eyes were set deeply under hairless brows. A shock of coarse black hair hung like a ragged fringe across his eyes. There was no forehead between the greasy hair and the flat bridge of the negroid nose.

In one huge hand he held a big Colt automatic. The other hand gripped the handle of a keen-edged machette. This was Luis Losaro. . . . Nono.

HE grunted like an animal. At the signal the place swarmed with Yaquis. Some were naked, others wore odd bits of clothes. Some had parts of federal uniforms. Every man of them was well-armed.

The tobacco and papers dropped from Devlin's hand. He let go the hackamore rope and jerked his gun. That was the last he remembered, save that something heavy had cracked like a thunderbolt and his eyes were blinded by a red haze. . . . Then oblivion.

Tom Devlin awoke with a splitting headache. Sunlight blinded his eyes when, after an effort, he managed to get them open. His hands were tied behind his back with a thin, tough thong that cut into the flesh at the least movement of his aching arms.

Several Yaquis sat around on the ground, eating hunks of half-cooked beef. Like so many hungry wolves, they scowled at him and grunted to each other. They jabbered in a jargon Devlin could not understand.

One of them, perceiving that Devlin was awake, came over and stood above him, a big hunk of dripping beef in one hand, an ugly knife in the other. He shoved the point of the knife against Devlin's throat.

"Pulque? Pulque, gringo? Where?"

Pulque is the cheapest and perhaps the strongest of the potent Mexican liquors. It is the drink of the peon who cannot afford tequila and mescal.

"Pulque, gringo?"

"No ketchum," growled Devlin. "No *pulque.*" And he added, "And if I did have some, I'd see you plumb in hell before you'd git a drop."

The Yaqui's black lips curled back in a snarl. The knife point bit through Devlin's skin. Then the knife was put away. The Yaqui walked back with reluctant step. Devlin's aching eyes saw the reason. That big, ugly-looking boss of theirs had appeared.

Nono strode over to where Devlin lay. Without a word, he reached down and lifted Devlin onto his feet. He did it as easily as Devlin could have lifted a child. The big half-wit pushed Devlin backward until the white man's shoulders were against the adobe wall. Devlin's feet were not bound in any way. But his knees felt weak and he was dizzy.

"STAND up, gringo. Damn gringo, stand up. You no stand, I fix you so you stand good."

He took his machette and with a few skilful strokes of its sharp blade, had fashioned two long, sharp pointed pegs.

"One for each shoulder, damn gringo."

There was no doubting the madman's meaning. He meant to drive his wooden pegs through the white man's flesh and pin him to the wall.

"And one through the belly, gringo."

He leered down at the tight-lipped prisoner.

"I'll stand," growled Devlin. "What do you want?"

"Womans."

The expression on the giant half-wit's face made Tom Devlin sick. He remembered the Mexican woman and her three daughters, none of them over fourteen. No need to guess what had happened to them. This big brute was more beast than human.

"No woman here."

Devlin's voice was harsh. The body

odors that came from the greasy, sweating, Nono were the sickening odors of an animal cage that has not been kept clean. Fear of the big brute gave way to a cold, terrible rage. Devlin asked no more than a chance to kill this greasy, stinking devil.

"Pulque?" snarled Nono. "Where you keep *pulque?"*

"Do those men savvy American talk?" asked Devlin, an idea forming in his mind.

"No. One word, two word, no more."

"Then listen. I got three bottles tequila. You drink it all. Yo're big chief?"

"Luis Losaro big boss. Where you hide that tequila?"

"Long way off. Untie my hands and I show you. Just you; nobody else."

"How much bottles?" There was a crafty glitter in the red eyes.

"Three, *tres.* Untie my hands."

Nono leered cunningly into the white man's face.

"No loose hands. You show me. *Pronto,* gringo. Or I cut off your ears and the tongue. March."

Tom Devlin marched with the ugly machette poking him in the spine. There was no other way. His trick had failed. He took Nono to the place where he had cached three of the bottles of tequila, a quarter mile from the house. They had gone there alone.

Nono allowed Devlin to sit down on the ground. Devlin watched the big half-wit take a stick and poke the cork down into the bottle. Watched him swill down the hot liquor as a very thirsty man drinks water. In less than ten minutes the big giant smashed the empty bottle against a rock and opened another.

"You might be a good drinking man," mused Devlin grimly, "but no human system on earth kin take on two quarts uh that stuff and not go haywire. Have at it, hombre. Git pig-drunk. Then lay down an' sleep it off. And Tom Devlin will handle all arrangements from there on."

CHAPTER V
SHOWDOWN LEAD

NONO began on his second bottle. Between drinks he would look at Devlin with a leering grin that chilled the white man's blood. Nono squatted on his black, leathery heels, just within arm's reach of his prisoner.

Devlin tried to get him to talk, but the liquor seemed to paralyze the half-wit's tongue. Now and then, in answer to Devlin's questions, he would slobber some jumbled words that the white man could not understand. But otherwise the tequila seemed to have little or no effect on the brute.

Devlin grimly took stock of the Yaqui leader's weapons. Beside the Colt automatic, he carried a Luger and a big single action .45 that Devlin recognized as his own gun. A Mauser rifle was hung across the broad back by its leather sling.

Devlin's wrists had been bound with wet rawhide strings that were now drying and shrinking so that they cut into his flesh. His hands were numb now. Even if he could so maneuver as to get to that broken bottle, he knew that his numbed hands would be too clumsy to use the broken glass to sever the tough rawhide.

This crazy beast might take a notion any time now to kill or torture his white prisoner. The black giant was even now running his thick thumb along the blade of the machette, his red eyes gleaming insanely. The second bottle of tequila was two-thirds empty.

All vestige of sanity was leaving Nono's face. His jaw hung loosely, tongue lolling limply, dripping. A vacant stare was glazing the red-black eyes. The cheek muscles twitched a little.

Then the big body suddenly twisted sidewise, the legs stiffening. The huge black body stretched out on its back, legs and arms twitching and quivering.

The beastlike face twitched horribly, the mouth frothed, the red eyes rolled back until only the whites showed.

Devlin had never seen epilepsy. He thought the liquor was having some queer effect on the half-wit. The sight of that beastlike black body, the slobbering, frothing mouth, was enough to turn a strong man sick. The froth became bloody now. The big, thick tongue was clamped between the stricken Nono's clenched teeth.

Frantically, desperately, Devlin fought to loosen that rawhide thong that would not give. He had kicked the machette clear of the twitching black body and was trying to get the sharp blade into position. He hardly felt the blade as it cut his hands instead of the rawhide thong.

The precious, fleeting seconds seemed hours. Then Devlin gave a groan of despair. A fierce-looking Yaqui had stepped from the brush. He came swiftly, without a sound, and there was a long-bladed knife in his hand.

He bent over Devlin, forced the white man over on his stomach. The next moment Devlin was free.

HE got to his feet. The Yaqui was gone. Devlin bent over the quivering Nono and ripped his belt and gun from the giant's waist. His hands were tingling with pain, dripping blood, unsteady, clumsy-fingered.

Nono was showing indications of recovery. The eyes were beginning to show more normally. His huge limbs and arms were quiet now. The jaws relaxed their grip on the half-severed tongue.

From the brush came a low-called warning.

"Vamos! Vamos, gringo!"

Devlin pulled his gaze away from the reviving Nono. He faced the brush. There was no sign of the friendly Yaqui. But standing there, snorting softly, stood Devlin's Pronto horse, hackamore rope wrapped around a mesquite limb.

Devlin made for the horse. A gun's roar checked him, whirling. Nono was sitting up, jabbering, slobbering, shooting wildly in an effort to bring down the white man.

Devlin's gun belched fire now, as fast as he could thumb back the hammer. The big slugs thudded into that heaving, dripping black chest, until it was covered red. Devlin leaped on Pronto's bare back and raced for freedom. He glanced back to see the big, black-skinned giant sag limply sidewise, blood-smeared, choking, spewing blood, horrible.

Devlin's gun was empty. Before he could re-load he was surrounded, jerked from the back of the terrified Pronto, made prisoner again. Among his captors Devlin spoted the tall Yaqui who had tried to give him his freedom.

Other Yaquis swarmed around now. They stood back from the dead Nono as if they were afraid to go nearer the big bloody, black hulk of dead flesh. And when they looked at Tom Devlin, there was more of awe than of animosity in their fierce eyes.

One of them was talking. A tall, straight, splendid-looking Yaqui. The others were listening.

Devlin had no way of knowing that the tall warrior was telling Nono's followers that this gringo had, but the day before, found the oldest chief of their tribe; that the gringo had taken the old man, who had suffered from too much sun, and cared for him; and that the old, old chief had claimed the white man as a friend. He had not allowed them to even keep the gringo's fine horse. . . .

Nono, the crazy one, was dead. This gringo had killed him. That was proof that Nono was not, as he had so often claimed, the bearer of a life that no knife or bullet could take away.

Nono, the crazy one, held by them in awe and terrible fear because his mind was crazy, was dead. He would never again claim the best of their women. He would never again kill those who

crossed his crazy will. He would never again fall over and die, foaming at the mouth, biting his ragged tongue, only to become once more alive.

Nono, the crazy one, the feared one, the one who had held them in his power because he was crazy and could crush a man's skull with the strength of his two hands, was dead. And it was this gringo, this man of white skin who had saved the life of the old, old chief, who had freed them from the bondage of Nono, the crazy one.

TOM DEVLIN could make nothing of the speaker's words, nor the words of the Yaquis who listened. He could not understand that, from this time on, he was safe from any molestation on the part of the dangerous Yaquis.

He saw them step back from him. He stooped and picked up his six-shooter from where it had fallen, there on the ground. Shoving the empty gun in its holster, he vaulted to the back of the restive Pronto. And as if they had not been there, Tom Devlin rode at a running walk back to the corral.

He was dazed at the success of his boldness. No one of them had made a move to halt him. Some of them had followed him and these talked among themselves, jabbering and grunting as they kept at a respectful distance.

Devlin re-loaded his six-shooter and threw his saddle on Ponto. He retrieved his Winchester from where it stood, partly hidden, alongside the corral. He led Pronto to the house and went inside, leaving the horse to stand outside, bridle reins on the ground.

Devlin kept his Winchester in his hand. They'd have to kill him now, if they wanted to lay a hand on him.

Devlin dug down in his war-sack and got some tobacco and his razor and a few other things. His eyes wandered around the adobe house. He'd leave his bed. That was about all he had left, now, to leave behind him. Mexico had cleaned him.

He wondered why the Yaquis didn't try to finish their job. He reckoned that they'd go at it in their own way, taking their own time to finish off the lone gringo who had killed their leader. Well, he'd be ready when they came at him. He'd git a bite or two while they was gittin' a meal. He'd play the game out like a man.

Devlin stepped up on his horse and rode away, his blood-smeared hands gripping his Winchester, his eyes squinting like slits of blue fire. And the Yaquis stood there, motionless, watching him as he rode away.

They had no words to make him understand that they meant him no harm. They had the sense to know that this gringo would shoot any of them who came near him. He had not understood their signs of truce.

The tall, fine-looking Yaqui who now assumed leadership called them to him. He talked to his men. He picked out two of their number and gave them some instructions. The two mounted their horses and rode away.

The two Yaquis rode swiftly, and toward the border. They took care that this white man did not see them as they passed him and kept on.

Tom Devlin kept to a steady trot. His anger had given way to saner reasoning. He was sure-enough busted now. There was no use in trying to make a go of it down here.

He might work a year, two years, three years, and these hills would be spotted with good cattle wearing his iron. Then the Yaquis would take it into their heads to run off his stock and kill him. And what could he do about it except put up a hard fight until they dropped him?

A man was as helpless as a crippled jack-rabbit in a yard filled with hounds. It took only one well-aimed bullet to kill a man. Nobody but a plumb idiot would stay here and git killed off.

So Tom Devlin said so-long to the Portales grant and headed Pronto for the border. It was bitter medicine but

the directions said take it and try to grin. Oddly enough, he felt no resentment toward the very polite Mexican who had sold him this gold brick spread. He'd just bin out-smarted, that's all, and it was all part of the game; part of the game that had beaten him.

"Well," he grinned crookedly, "I reckon I kin git a job somewheres, anyhow."

CHAPTER VI

NONE BUT THE BRAVE—

NEWS travels swiftly down there in Mexico. Burro telegraph, a wrathy gun-runner once termed that mysterious channel that carries even the bits of trifling happenings across the miles of desert and mountains.

So it was that, many hours before Tom Devlin rode up to that little adobe outpost fifteen miles below the border, certain army officials were fully appraised of all details concerning the death of one Luis Losaro, more generally known as Nono. And as grisly proof of the big half-wit's passing, there was, in a far corner of what served as an office, a blood-stained burlap sack that contained nothing less than the huge head of the dead man.

In one of the three cells were three Yaquis. Two of these were the messengers who had passed and out-distanced Tom Devlin on his way north. The third Yaqui had fetched the sack containing Nono's head.

Waiting at the little outpost were several important-looking Mexicans. One of these was none other than the very polite man who had leased Tom Devlin the Portales grant. Another was the father of that small boy whom Nono had killed that night he left his home to become a bandit. There was the mayor from the border town, the chief of police and a colonel of the federal army.

They smoked fat cigars and drank bottles of beer that came from wet sacks that kept it fairly cool. With them sat an American newspaper editor who had lived thirty years on the border. It was said of the newspaper editor, who, incidentally was the brother-in-law of the governor of that Mexican state, that he knew Mexico even better than the Mexicans.

It was the newspaper editor who first greeted the unshaven, dusty, hungry, disheartened but grinning Tom Devlin.

"Unfortunately, Devlin, we have no gilded key to the city to present you, but there'll be quite a banquet, old man, with the usual speeches, champagne, and what not."

He turned to the fat non-com who, but a few months ago, had held Devlin up at this selfsame spot and exacted unlawful toll. He addressed the uneasy non-com in the Mexican language.

"Care for Señor Devlin's horse. Water, grain and rub-down with wet rags. And see that you do a good job."

The words would have tickled Devlin, had he understood. As he saw this once belligerent Mexican caring for Pronto, Devlin chuckled a little and let the newspaper editor lead him inside.

That hour was something to be remembered. Devlin was too dazed to comprehend the meaning of it at all. And if he had thought the Mexicans were polite of manner before, he was more than convinced now. Glasses were filled with foaming beer. They all stood. Each touched the rim of his glass against the rim of Tom Devlin's glass.

"Salud, Señor!"

DEVLIN wondered if he was under arrest for something and they were making him feel good before they took him out and shot him. The name and record of the dead Nono meant nothing to Devlin. He jumped a little when the Mexican colonel shook that horrible-looking black head from its sack.

"Whew!" Devlin grinned in a sickly manner and nudged the newspaper man.

"What the hell's the idea, anyhow?"

"Nothing much, Devlin, except that you can have just about any kind of a layout you care to ask for down here."

And it was not until they were in the merchant's high-powered and very expensive closed car, driven by a Mexican sergeant, that Tom Devlin began to understand.

The three Yaquis had been fed and sent back with certain messages. These messages all concerned the fact that the Señor Tomas Devlin was now the sole owner of the entire Portales grant and all the stock on that grant. This was in exact accordance with the wishes of the very, very old Yaqui chief who had sent word that unless this white man was well rewarded, there would be trouble between Mexico and his people. The messengers also carried back word that the big reward for the head of Nono would go to this Señor Tomas Devlin.

"Can't you get it through your head, Devlin," repeated the newspaper man, "that you're made? That big grant is yours, without a string attached. The reward on that Nono animal is, in itself, a nice fortune. Man, you've clicked! Can't you understand?"

"No," confessed Tom Devlin bluntly, "I'm doggoned if I can. All I kin savvy is that I'm dirty, ragged, tired out, hungry and busted flatter than a thin tortilla. I bumped off a big black-hided son that had it comin'. I'm on my way back to Arizona to hunt a job. That's all that I know. The rest of it don't make sense."

"At my house," said the newspaper man gently, "is a spare room with a private bath. I've had your trunk and baggage sent up there from the hotel storage room. There's a certified check for ten thousand dollars and a clear title to the Portales grant and all livestock on that grant, that will be handed to you tonight at the banquet. And I don't know Mexico and the value of land and stock if that layout won't make you a cold million. Maybe it don't make sense, old chap, but it's nothing but the truth."

"It don't make sense," muttered Devlin drowsily.

He hadn't eaten for a long time. The beer and the heat made him sleepy. So sleepy he was that he could not keep his eyes open. But his companions in the car minded not at all when Devlin went sound asleep.

"IT don't make sense," Devlin still repeated a few evenings later when he sat on the cool veranda.

He was bathed and shaved and his hair was cropped short. His clothes were well tailored and the dark-eyed sister of the editor's wife thought that this big silver-haired cowman with the laughing blue eyes and a boy's infectious grin was far handsomer than any man she had ever known.

"Of course it does not make sense, Señor," she laughed.

He had told her more about his life, his success and his failure, more about his dreams, than he had ever told anyone. And he admitted to himself that he had never met a more charming, more beautiful, more understanding woman than this lady who now laughed with him. She alone could understand how he felt.

"It is like a fairy story, no?" she smiled at him. "You believe in those fairies?"

"Do you?" grinned Devlin.

They were sitting in a porch swing. His hand found hers and kept it. Her eyes were soft. Her red mouth trembled a little. Her voice was soft and very low when she spoke again.

"Yes."

"I . . . I've never asked any girl to marry me. I don't know any other way to go about it. I reckon I'm more scared this minute than I ever was in my life. But if you'd say 'yes' to what I'm tryin' to ask you, I'll believe in anything."

"I would not need to know you longer," she said gravely, "to know that I love you."

The very polite Mexican, so it turned out, was none other than the brother of Devlin's bride. The colonel was her uncle. The governor gave her away in marriage to the Señor Tomas Devlin. It was all very impressive, very beautiful and, after the formality was over, very gay. A string orchestra played in the moonlight.

Tom Devlin and his bride drove away in the beautiful roadster that was a wedding gift from the governor. They were going to California for their honeymoon. They would be gone two months. When they returned the army of Mexican workmen would have finished the new house there on the Portales rancho.

"Some day, mebbyso," Tom Devlin grinned, "I'll make sense out of it." He slowed the speed of the shiny roadster to take into his arms this bit of womanhood that now meant so much to him. "It's like a dream."

"Of course," she laughed, her lips against his cheek. "A very, very wonderful dream. That is so. And since when are dreams made of sensible material?"

"Honey," said Tom Devlin, "I reckon that is the one right answer."

From start to finish, it was one of those things that could happen nowhere but down there in Mexico. Nor could it have happened to hardly anyone except Tom Devlin.

THE END

Another Western story by Walt Coburn appears in the current issue of ACTION STORIES. . . . Ambushed guns sang an outlaw saga of death to the Benner clan. Then Corrigan called for the showdown ace—and a grave gave up its slave to back his play. . . . Read this cowboy-author's complete novel, "Trigger Feud," in October ACTION STORIES—now on the stands.

PRETTY SENORITAS ARE TRUANT OFFICERS

THE progressive government of the Dominican Republic, which is combating illiteracy with a law requiring that all children attend school, has hit upon a novel means of eliminating truancy.

Instead of selecting hard-featured male truant officers, pretty girls are chosen and sent into the highways and byways to win young Juan and Pedro away from playing hooky. These charming truant officers are sympathetic and friendly to the errant school children.

The youngsters confide in them. Often it is the want of a pair of shoes or shame for being obliged to wear ragged garments that blocks the road to an education.

Learning this, the government offers aid. While it is the common custom of the poorer classes of Dominicans to go bare-foot, the government insists that all school children must have shoes.

When the edict was pronounced, a clamor arose from parents who objected to what they termed a "foreign innovation," but the authorities were firm. Either supply shoes for the youngsters or work in jail until the footwear is paid for. That is the law.

For a few weeks after this rule went into effect, arrests were numerous. But today the law is generally obeyed. Papa and mama may wiggle their toes in comfort even in the plazas of the large cities, but the patter of little shoes echoes in every school yard. And after all, papa and mama are growing proud of the sound.

A Story of the Dark Continent

EGGS OF AFRICA

By A. de HERRIES SMITH

Author of "Snake Dancers"

"Find eggs!" was the limey sergeant's order. Neither Afric's spearmen nor Prussia's gunboats could scare Gaffney and Free back empty-handed.

"THIS ain't a war. A bleedin' election tour; that's what it is. Wish I was back in the clink."

Private "Pud" Gaffney groaned rather than spoke the words. His lips did not move, but the plaint was distinctly heard by his comrade, whose chin barely reached to the speaker's shoulder.

"Can the snappy palaver!" Private "Iggy" Free retorted venomously, also without moving his lips. "Shanz has his eye on us. Dry up!"

With a hundred other members of the Mombassa Light Infantry the little American wanderer and his ungainly comrade stood on the wide parade ground at Fort Kilera. The twin motionless lines of khaki defied the burning central African sun.

Facing the rigid ranks was Adolph Shanz, orderly sergeant. He held a typewritten paper in front of him, and went on droning through his nose:

". . . a respect for military service. Soldiers will not be allowed without the precincts of the barracks or lines unless properly dressed. They must not smoke in the streets, and it is stressed particularly that the habit of 'walking out' with native women tends to—"

"Blah, blah, blah!" Private Gaffney broke in on the Orders of the Day in a low buzz. He shifted his great frame to avoid a particularly hot spot where the tunic pressed on his shoulders.

"Lookit them colored boys," he added, nudging the diminutive Free. "Black as the Earl of Hell's waistcoat an' as happy as Larry. Sun don't fizz none of them blokes. Lord! Wish I was in the clink."

Private Free's sharp brown eyes went over to where two companies of the King's African Rifles were drilling. They were splendidly proportioned negroes, clad in khaki drill, their heads crowned by red tarboshes. An officer was barking orders at them. The companies swung back and forth under the glittering sun; bare feet moving in

rhythm, ranks opening and closing with machine-like precision.

It was apparent that the K.A.R. were enjoying themselves. Although young in years Iggy had seen service in China, Alaska and the Philippines, and that any soldiers—even blacks—should revel in squad drill annoyed him considerably.

Free shrugged his shoulders in mute disgust and allowed his eyes to rove still further. Down beside the glinting, horizonless waters of Lake Tanganyika stood a large, grass-thatched hut. Khaki figures lazed in the shade of the roof's overhang, figures that were apparently at peace with all the world.

"Them damn prisoners has the best time of any guys I knows," the little man said to himself, wearily. "That fat old coop sergeant is a prince all right. Wish I was back there, rollin' the bones with the boys. Cool too. No work, no drill. Oh, shucks!"

"HERE!" Gaffney's buzz suddenly smote Free's ears. "Watch out!"

Private Free removed his eyes from the heavenly clink and turned them toward the sergeant. Shanz had tucked the Orders of the Day into his tunic pocket and was reading a "chit" which had just been brought to him by a native runner.

"Com-panee! Stan' at ease!" Shanz barked. At once the two khaki lines melted into more comfortable postures.

"I have in me hand an important document," Sergeant Shanz continued as he walked over and stood close to the two lines of sweating men. "The officers' mess ain't got no eggs an' this company is delegated to get 'em. Two men wanted. Volunteers take one pace forward. March!"

Private Gaffney nudged Private Free violently, but the little man had already pulled himself together. To both minds had come the same splendid vision. They saw themselves, each suspended in a hammock slung on poles, carried through the shady jungle by four satiny-coated blackmen. It would be a delightful holiday, free from care.

As if animated by clockwork, the two men jerked themselves erect and took one brisk pace forward, then came to "attention"; rigidly erect, thumbs at the seams of their khaki shorts, eyes fixed on nothing, in the regulation manner.

"Ah!" Sergeant Shanz breathed the exclamation softly. A slow smile crept across his weasel face, his narrow shoulders shook with subdued mirth. "Two gallant volunteers, ready to sacrifice all for duty. The bloody war is won."

"'Shun'! Dis-miss!" the sergeant roared at the parade; then addressed the volunteers, "Quick march! Right wheel! Hep-hep-hep!"

Swinging wide of the still animated African Rifles and followed by the more curious of the Mombassa Light Infantry, Shanz marched the two volunteers past the staring occupants of the shade-filled guardhouse, only halting when he reached the edge of that huge inland sea known on the maps as Lake Tanganyika.

"Here's ten shillings," Shanz announced curtly. "Sign the receipt. There's your limousine. Hop in an' get eggs."

"Ain't we goin' to have no bearers to carry us in hammocks," Pud Gaffney queried, sudden distress mantling his round, red face.

"Not so's you'd notice it," the sergeant retorted acidly. "You're in the Navy now," he added. Both Pud and Iggy recognized that they had been trapped.

Shanz pointed to several native dugout canoes which lay on the beach between the Naval rowboats. Beyond them were two gunboats which had been used so far without success to hunt down the Kaiser's armed launches which raided the British outposts regularly from their base across the lake in the territory of German East Africa.

"You big boob!" Free hissed suddenly, his eyes glinting with venom as they roved over Gaffney's huge frame.

"You had them hammocks in your

noodle too!" Pud retorted. "You was just as quick as me to step out. Climb into that there battleship an' take your medicine."

"HALT!" Shanz roared.

The two had taken their seats in the wobbly dugout and dipped the paddles. The sergeant had not forgotten that episode of tying the baby monkey in his trouser leg while he slept. He intended to repay Private Gaffney in full.

"Your orders are that you will proceed to M'loo's village, traveling via Alligator Island and up the Ruwa creek. You will return before nightfall with five dozen eggs. If you are not here by the time 'Retreat' sounds I think I may say without fear of contradiction that you will not rest in the fragrant shade of the clink, but that instead you will be doing pack drill on the square."

The two volunteers sat motionless in the canoe, conscious of the sea of amused faces behind Shanz' back. They knew too much to talk back, however, and awaited the final word of warning.

"I do hope that the Fritzie gunboats don't bump into you," the sergeant went on slowly. "One was up here day before yesterday. The German boys have a trick of making their prisoners break stones on the roads. Happy days! You may proceed."

Gaffney drove his paddle down with a furious gesture, almost upsetting the canoe. Free swore with his usual volubility, righted the dugout and dipped his blade.

With the sun striking down through their sweaty clothing the two volunteers slid under a gunboat's counter, where white-clad sailors lay stretched under the awnings. Then came the stab of sun on glinting water and the dugout was headed for Alligator Island and the mangrove swamps across the lake.

"WELL, you miserable runt, we ain't sunk yet, anyhow," Private Gaffney addressed his comrade. He pulled his paddle aboard, mopped his streaming face and pointed to the green wall of jungle just ahead of them.

"No thanks to your navigatin', you cow-faced wop!" the little man retorted, licking his dry lips. "Lucky for you that the pride of the Third U. S. Engineers is in command of this outfit. If one of them Fritzie floatin' coffins had come breezin' up we'd have been in a sweet jam. Shut your fly trap an' dig down with that paddle. There's the mouth of Ruwa creek over by them palms."

Gaffney made as though to smite his comrade with the paddle, but found the movement too wearisome and instead let the blade slide into the water. They entered the mouth of the creek. Keeping to the limited shade of the mangrove trees, they paddled up the slimy waterway.

Gaily-plumaged birds flitted across the creek. Monkeys jabbered at them from the trees. Now and then an alligator drifted down-stream, nothing but a wicked eye and the tip of his nose revealed.

Neither of the soldiers took any notice of these things. They were of everyday occurrence, and in any case it was too hot to enjoy nature. All that mattered was that they reach M'loo's village, buy the eggs, and be back at the fort before "Retreat" sounded.

Hours passed. Still no village appeared. Finally it dawned on Iggy's active brain that they were up the wrong creek. Heated argument followed, but it was finally decided that they would keep on going. There would certainly be some native villages and now there was no time to go back and look for the Ruwa.

Both the paddles dipped with sudden energy. Each man had a mental vision of two laden figures doubling about the parade ground at Fort Kilera under the killing sun. Shanz would certainly log them if they did not get back before night; nothing surer.

"Hey, you insignificant piece of tripe! What did I tell you?" Gaffney bellowed all at once from his position in the bow. "Native village right ahead an' the place is boilin' over with chickens. Lucky, but by cripes we'll have to steam it up goin' back."

Free craned his head about the other man's sweat-soaked shoulder and saw that what Gaffney said was correct. They were approaching a group of yellowish grass huts set out in a little clearing by the sluggish river. Vague black figures flitted about between the huts. And there was certainly a pile of hens. That was the main thing.

The duguot beached, the two scrambled out thankfully. They stretched their limbs and freed the sticky shirts from their backs. Gaffney was preparing to stride forward in his usual direct manner, when Free's clutching hand brought him to a sudden halt.

"Hey!" the little man shrilled. "Look at that!"

"Look at wha—?"

PUD'S lips did not complete the sentence. He found himself staring at a dirty red, white and black flag that hung suspended by a bamboo from between two low trees.

"That's a Fritzie flag!" Iggy hissed in dismay. "We've gone an' butted into German territory. The krauts gives a flag to each of the village chiefs to play with. About turn!"

"About turn nothing," Gaffney retorted. "No whites here. I'll shoot some Heinie talk at 'em. We gotta get them eggs. It'll be all right. You scared or what? Here they come."

Gaffney started forward, dragging the unwilling Free. A dozen women stared at the intruders; then darted back into the huts, pulling children with them. Dogs barked; hens squawked. A band of about twenty warriors slid into view. They were armed with spears and shields.

"Kamerad! Und so weiter—das beste ist gut genug!" Pud roared at the approaching figures, thereby exhausting all his supply of German phrases.

"Hello there, old timers!" he added, "How's chances for a mess of eggs for the lousy officers?"

"That hobo yabble don't get us nowhere," grunted Iggy.

The advancing negroes suddenly halted, eyed the soldiers suspiciously and then apparently went into conference.

"Mebbe not," Gaffney replied, irritation in his tones. "Sign talk is the stuff. Watch now."

The big man pointed at the hens and made clucking noises, then gave an excellent imitation of a person cracking an egg with a spoon. At this demonstration one of the more nervous blacks jumped back suddenly and threw up his spear. Iggy laughed unfeelingly.

"All right! All right!" Gaffney thundered, stung to the quick. "Watch this, you laughin' hyena."

"Cock-a-doodle-do! Cock-a-doodle-do!" The big man roared at the pitch of his lungs. The better to aid the savages' understanding he took a step forward, at the same time beating his arms against his ribs in the manner of a rooster flapping its wings.

An instantaneous reply came. The nervous negro whizzed his spear at the actor. But although large, Gaffney could move fast. He was not there when the spear stuck quivering in the moist earth. Silence came to the two groups as they sized each other up.

An old negro, who was apparently the chief, suddenly emitted a dog-like yelp and commenced swaying to and fro. Two of the younger men behind him clashed their *assagais* on their shields and yelled a war cry. It echoed back from the jungle walls, bringing shrill female calls from the grass huts.

"Ignorant boobs don't savvy nothin'" Pud whispered to his companion. "Wisht I had a gun. What'll we do now, eh?"

"If you can't handle this thing, big boy, stand out of the way an' let a man through what can," Iggy said, insolence in his voice.

The little man stepped out from behind his companion and walked toward the chief. At once the huge negroes broke out into hoots of derisive laughter. Free took no notice; he was accustomed to being jeered at on account of his size.

IGGY darted forward, dodged under the old chief's outheld spear. He smacked the man across the face. A hard heel ground down on the negro's bare foot. The spear was wrenched from his hand. Grasping it as though the weapon were a bayoneted rifle, Iggy threw himself at the other natives.

There was nothing left for Gaffney to do but follow suit. Cursing Iggy furiously, he wrenched the wooden shield out of the amazed chief's grip and banged it on the nearest head. A spear flashed under his armpit in reply. It came to Pud on wings of light that if they got any eggs in this village it would be over the occupants' dead bodies.

Gaffney smashed the sharp edge of the shield into a black face, wreathed in dull amazement. He caught a fleeting glimpse of Iggy. The little man appeared to be possessed of seven devils. He dodged under the flashing black arms, fended off the thrusting spears with the shaft of his own weapon and drove up viciously with the blade.

A spear grazed Gaffney's shoulder, brought a red smear to his shirt. It also brought the Irish blood boiling to the surface. With a howl louder than any of the negroes' the big man hurled himself into the fight. He was stamping, kicking at the bare shins, and making wild sweeps with the wooden shield.

All at once a black body fell against Pud's legs, hands clawing at him. He kicked the negro's grip off and leaped over the fallen man just in time to see Iggy plunge his spear into another native. The handle broke off short as the man fell backward. But Iggy was seeing red.

Like a mountain lion at bay he charged into the now wavering negroes. Before Gaffney could reach his side, the blacks were racing back through the huts, sending squawking chickens and howling dogs fleeing before them.

"Come on, loafer!" Free panted. He leaped over the bodies on the ground before him and tore after the retreating negroes. Pud saw the little man jump up at the German flag, tear it down from where it hung between the trees and dodge into the nearest hut.

When Gaffney panted into the hut it was to find that Iggy was down on his hands and knees, fumbling with his matchbox. He managed to light a match and hold it against the thatched side of the hut until it started to blaze.

"Burn 'em all!" the little man wheezed. "Hollywood stuff—flames, smoke, yells! Get it?"

"Aw, shut up!" Gaffney panted. "They're gone. What you want the damned flag for, anyhow?"

"Where was you eddicated; in a sawmill?" the American inquired acidly. "Got the flag to carry the eggs in, brainless. You'll be a buck private in the tail end of the rear rank all your blasted life. Get busy!"

THE little man pointed to a large earthen crock in one corner of the windowless hut, now illuminated by the crackling fire. Pud knew enough about negro kraals to understand that it contained the family eggs. In a moment he was down beside the other man and feverishly piling up eggs in the center of the flag which Iggy held at the corners.

"Down to the canoe with 'em!" Free ordered all at once, glancing over his shoulder at the blazing walls. "I'll guard the rear."

Gaffney swung the loaded flag over his shoulder and dodged out of the hut with Iggy on his heels. Grasping a handful of blazing thatch, the little man ran from hut to hut, touching them off. Cries of rage came from the jungle, several half-hearted spears were thrown

at Free. He took no notice until he saw Gaffney reach the canoe. Then Iggy wheeled and sprinted back to the craft.

Yells of defiance immediately came from the trees. Several black bodies slid into view. Iggy at once stopped, grabbed one of the dead natives' spears and made as though to return to the attack. At once the negroes disappeared.

Gaffney was standing up in the dugout's stern, pushing with the paddle. Iggy went aboard with a flying leap. Just as his feet touched the craft's bottom, Pud pushed with all his strength. Free did a semi-somersault and sat down fairly upon the flag-load of eggs.

He opened his mouth to express a profane opinion of his comrade, but the words were lost when Gaffney pitched his great frame directly on top of him. Iggy sent in a nasty jab to Pud's left ear, but the big man made no reply except to snort and crouch down still more.

Whing! Whing!

"Lie still, you damned trench-rat!" Gaffney whispered hoarsely. "Can't you see—"

A thrown spear flashed past Iggy's eyes and stuck quivering in the opposite side of the canoe. Then he knew that the blacks were running along the creek's bank and endeavoring to spear them as they floated helplessly along.

"What the heck you tryin' to do? Think I'm a mattress, eh?" Iggy growled. "Lookit, you're crammin' me into these eggs. I don't give a hoot if there's a million blacks. Get off me, you big baboon or I'll—"

With a squeal of outraged dignity the little man beat a tattoo on Pud's bent head. Gaffney could stand no more. He hit back and in a moment the two were up on their knees and exchanging punches.

A chorus of disappointed howls floated out from the trees along the bank just as the dugout was caught by the current, twirled out of the main stream and carried down a smaller tributary.

Gaffney drew back his arm for another blow, but the hand dropped and his eyes sought Free's. Sudden realization came to them both. The eggs were all smashed, the day was drawing along, and— To both minds again came the vision of figures laden with full fighting kit and doubling around the dusty parade ground at Fort Kilera, under the blistering sun. The thought drove all ideas of further combat away.

Iggy emptied the remains of the eggs overboard, rinsed the flag and threw it aboard again. For a full five minutes they sat motionless in the twisting canoe, eyeing each other speculatively.

FREE turned his head to find that the canoe had nosed up on a sandbar fringed by a thick growth of bush, with beyond again the impenetrable tropical forest.

"Cripes, I'm dry, Pud," the little man exclaimed. "Gotta get a drink. Mebbe there's a spring somewhere around here. Come on."

Gaffney nodded. In another minute they had pulled the canoe up on the sandbar and were walking along the sandpit.

"Hey!" Iggy's sharp eyes had seen something moving in the fringe of bushes. He pulled Gaffney to a halt. Whatever the thing was it slid off silently into the jungle again. The two soldiers went forward once more, only to stop again with low whistles of surprise.

They were looking down into a hollow scraped out of the sand, in which reposed about a dozen huge eggs. Each one equalled a dozen hens' eggs, but eggs they were nevertheless. Again the War Gods smiled.

"Ostrich eggs!" Free exclaimed with delight. "Holy Mackinaw, we're in lucky! They make jake puddin's. I seen the cooks use 'em down in the Orange Free State. We'll pack 'em along. The chow murderer can dope 'em up into egg substitoots for the sanctified shavetails. Saved, by heck! Get the flag an' we'll load 'em up."

Gaffney patted the little man's head

in appreciation of his brain work. In a few minutes the ostrich eggs were tied up in the flag and tenderly lowered into the canoe.

Baa—aa-a! Baa—aa-a!

"Goat!" Gaffney whispered after a minute's intense thought. "Where there's goats there's blacks," he added. "We'll mosey."

"Easy a minnit," Iggy appealed. "I'm as dry as the inside of a lime barrel. I gotta get a swig of goat's milk. We'll have a look anyhow. Come on."

Pud waved a protesting hand, but the thirsty Private Free was already stepping along cautiously in the direction of the bleating sounds.

The shade gave way to blazing light once more. Iggy parted the bushes and stared out. Almost immediately his face came back again white, strained, the sharp little eyes wide with amazement.

Pud grunted, pushed past him and looked out. His face changed too. An extraordinary picture met his gaze. Less than half a dozen paces away a man lay on the flat of his back, asleep.

He was dressed in a soiled Naval uniform. It didn't look like a British outfit, though. Beside him lay a round Naval cap. A few paces away a small African goat was tied to a tree. The rope was all twisted up and the animal was making vain endeavors to free itself.

Gaffney's gaze leaped over the slumbering sailor to an even more astonishing scene. His breath came in stifled gasps. On the far side of the clearing, in a sluggish estuary, a small gray painted vessel lay on its side in the mud. Lazy smoke oozed up from a thick funnel; awnings were spread over the decks. A dozen or more men were paddling about at the ship's stern, working at her propellers.

PUD'S wide eyes took in all these things quickly. What impressed him most were the two guns mounted fore and aft on the vessel, and the red, white and black flag that hung limply over her stern.

He was about to pull back again when he felt Free's hands at his knees. Glancing down he saw the little man reach out a crooked stick and slowly pull the Naval cap toward the bushes in which they hid. The goat bleated again, its guardian snored, and a cold shiver struck down Gaffney's spine.

Iggy took no notice. He pulled the cap into the bushes and held it up to the light. The black ribbon about it carried in gold lettering the words "S. M. S. Herzogin Sophie Charlotte."

"Kihootin pigs!" Free whispered. "One of them German gunboats. Bust her boiler or somethin'. Betcha that's the tin coffin that our armed launches was huntin' yesterday. Boy, this is no place for us. Slide out!"

Gaffney was already on his way. He disliked doing pack drill under the African sun, but even more so did he detest the idea of breaking stones under the same glaring orb.

"You keep your trap shut about this!" Pud warned Free with sudden savagery. They had reached the creek again and were paddling as hard as they could in the direction of the lake.

"By right, we should go an' capture that mob; at least that fool Colonel would think so. Let the Navy do its own dirty work; bunch of lazy loafers lyin' down on deck all day. I ain't goin' to break no rocks in this or any other man's army. Hey, what you think I am; a steam engine? Dig in!"

"I'll bounce this paddle on your thick bean. You're darned right I won't say nothin'." Free responded.

A BRASS-throated cavalry trumpet was blaring "Retreat." The crimson ensign was coming slowly earthwards.

Two sweat-encrusted figures wearily paddled a dugout up to the bank at Fort Kilera. They jumped ashore, stood at attention until the trumpet's last note died away in wailing echoes and then went across the wide parade ground at the double.

Pud, leading, raced about a corner of one of the men's quarters. He almost bumped into the Officer of the Day and the Orderly Sergeant, who were making the rounds. The two soldiers came to an immediate halt and pulled themselves erect.

"What's this?" the officer asked, pointing with his cane at the two disreputable, sweat-caked figures confronting him.

"Privates Gaffney and Free, sir," Sergeant Shanz intoned happily through his nose. "Sent them for eggs for the officers' mess, sir, at the same time warning them to be back before 'Retreat' sounded."

"Hah! Gaffney and Free! Old offenders," the captain said throatily. "Take the eggs to the mess, sergeant, and then march these two men down to the guardhouse. They'll be up before the Colonel in the morning."

"M'loo's hens all got the chicken-pox. Look out there, sergeant; them is ostrich eggs. Best we could do," Iggy advised Shanz.

Under the eyes of their comrades peering at them from the verandahs, Privates Free and Gaffney were marched across the darkening parade ground and turned over to the sergeant of the guard.

"Home again an' damn glad of it," Pud said affably to the faces staring at the two from the lighted guardhouse. "Just what the doctor ordered. You guys got any of that native beer left?"

A gourd filled with the black fluid was thrust into the big man's hand in reply. He drank deeply; then waved the gourd at his comrade. But Iggy was already down on his knees and reaching for the dice that a fat, unshaven private was rattling in time to a rugged chant.

Supper came, they washed, lay in the evening cool and finally rolled up in their blankets on the floor.

MORNING came with the blaring of bugles, but the happy inmates of the clink lay in their blankets and smiled at each other. Breakfast arrived and was being set up on the table when a tornado of sound burst on the clink's calm. Four soldiers guarding a prisoner appeared at the door. After much violent language Sergeant Shanz was thrown into the jail.

In hushed silence he picked himself up off the floor and stood peering about him. Then the prisoners saw that his tunic sleeve no longer bore the three chevrons of authority. For some mysterious reason the newcomer was now Private Shanz.

Illumination stabbed Iggy Free's brain. With a bellow of rage, Shanz rushed across the hut and smote him with something across the face. The thing was clammy and alive . . . a baby alligator!

"I'll kick your ruddy face in!" Shanz yelled, still waving his strange weapon. "I'll teach you to get me to carry alligator's eggs to the officers' mess, tellin' me they was ostrich eggs. Made me lose me stripes, did ya, you hunk of...

Private Free caused the flow of language to cease by a well-directed blow on the nose.

"Lord!" the big man mumbled to himself. "Might have known that ostriches didn't lay their blasted eggs on sandbars. Alligators for the officers! Holee cow!"

As in a horrid dream he saw himself and Private Free undergoing new varieties of torture especially invented for their entertainment by the outraged officers. Why, pack drill was nothing to what they would get now. Alligators!

Still dazed with the horror of his thoughts, Pud was dimly aware of Iggy dragging Shanz to his feet. Then the little man's fist flashed again and the ex-sergeant disappeared from view, in time to genuine applause from the clink's inmates.

One of the men was picking Shanz up. Others were loudly demanding that Sergeant "Fatty" Pogson send a runner for beer, when the door was darkened again. The Regimental Sergeant Major

stood in the portal, spurred, be-medalled, terrible. He gazed within grimly then bellowed:

"Privates Gaffney and Free; on the double!"

Tugging down their uniforms, the two men marched out briskly into the stabbing sunshine, well knowing that this was the end. The Sergeant Major glared at them, barked curt orders. Before they rightly knew it they were being marched out to where the battalion was formed up on the parade ground.

THE two prisoners came to a halt before Colonel Frame. They saluted and awaited what might befall.

"You men were sent for eggs?" the Colonel commenced, fixing them with a piercing eye.

"Yes, sir!"

"Kindly inform me how it came about that the eggs with which you returned were wrapped in a German Naval flag?" the Colonel queried coldly.

Gaffney glanced at Free out of the corner of one eye. Apparently the Old Man was not worried about the alligator eggs. The flag was the thing. This was a new angle. Iggy thought rapidly.

"Sir," the little man commenced briskly, his face wistful and innocent. "We was goin' for this here hen fruit, when—*Bam!*—along comes a kraut cruiser. It was up a creek, sir. Private Gaffney rams his paddle into the propeller and kinda jams up the works. Anyhow somethin' goes wrong an' we's in the middle of a fight."

"I say! Well, go on!" The Colonel's jaw dropped, his bushy, white eyebrows danced.

"Yes, sir," Gaffney took up the tale, thinking to improve upon it. "Iggy here —Private Free, Sir—thrown three of them Germans into the drink. I'm lucky enough to bump off a couple more. We captures her flag an' in the middle of the excitement the blinkin' gunboat goes ashore in the mud. She's there yet, sir."

The now purple-faced Colonel waved his arms excitedly, beckoning the other officers to come up. Then he motioned to Private Gaffney to continue.

"Yes, sir," Pud proceeded, tugging out the cap which had been the property of the German goat herder. "The little man here is fightin' like seventeen wildcats an' before we dives off the gunboat an' swims to the canoe he grabs one of their lids. Here it is, sir."

"Extraordinary!" the Colonel gasped, holding the cap at arm's length. "Never heard of such a thing before. How was it you did not report this immediately?" he asked suddenly.

"Sir, we was afraid you'd think we was liars," Private Free said modestly, lowering his eyes.

Colonel Frame laid an affectionate, yet pudgy hand on Iggy's shoulder while he ordered a lieutenant to convey information of the stranded German gunboat's location to the Naval commander. Then he turned back again.

"Private Free and Private Gaffney the Mombassa Light Infantry is proud of you," the Colonel intoned pompously in a voice audible all over the parade ground. "This is one of the outstanding events of the whole war. We shall see what can be done for you. Meantime you are free and may return to your platoon. Sergeant-Major, march these men off."

As they were marched across the parade ground toward their pop-eyed comrades Iggy favored Pud with a withering glare.

"You big, useless prune, look what you done," the little man hissed. "We'll never get back to the clink now."

"I know it," Gaffney admitted humbly. "Frame is goin' to make us corporals or somethin'."

Private Free groaned at the thought. The two adventurers fell into their places. Sadly they stared at that thatched haven where the black beer flowed and the ivory cubes rattled alluringly in the fragrant shade.

A Texas Mystery Story

THE FATAL FIFTEENTH

By

J. E. GRINSTEAD

Author of "Rangers of the Rio," etc.

Giant saws screamed a death paean. For the monster phantom of the mill was roused again to claim another victim.

A WILD scream echoed from the pines along the shore of Red Lake. It was the sort of scream that causes every nerve to twist and vibrate.

The sound soared high above the growling and snarling of the big Clawson mill, which squatted on the shore of the lake and snatched wet logs out of the water like some beast feeding on crayfish. As the wail died out, the mill became silent. Men came tumbling from the doors.

That screaming was only the fire siren. There was no sign of fire except the smoke that floated lazily from the six great stacks of the mill.

A man, bareheaded, came racing down the shore of the lake, past the planing mill, and on to the scene of the excitement. His slight limp, as he ran, identified him as Robert Clawson, owner of the mill.

"What is it, fellows? Fire?" he questioned, panting from the exertion.

"No!" said one of the men. "It's worse than fire. Radlef, the bear fighter . . ."

"What about Radlef?" snapped Clawson.

"Why—why, he just ain't! Disappeared."

"Disappeared? What do you mean? Maybe he didn't come to work this morning'"

"Yes, he did. I saw him two minutes before the shift changed. Saw him at the shed changing his clothes, and saw him go up the steps to the mill. I followed him inside of three minutes. When I got into the Mill, Olsen was still fighting the bear

and cursing because Radlef didn't come to relieve him. I knew what had happened and sounded the siren."

"You knew! What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean. He ain't the first bear-fighter that has disappeared from this job."

"Nonsense! Because a few drifters have jumped their jobs, you fellows want to make a great mystery of it."

"Radlef didn't jump his job," replied the man doggedly. "I tell you, I seen him go into the mill. He never did get to the bear-pit. Just disappeared like that!" and the fellow snapped his fingers in Clawson's face.

"Get on back to your work," ordered Clawson. "Radlef will show up after a while, probably. If he doesn't . . ."

"If he don't, they bane nobody to fight the bear," growled a giant Swede who stood near. "Ay don't fight it double shift for nobody, Ay tal you that now."

"All right, Olsen," said the mill-owner, placatingly. "I don't ask you to do double duty. I'll find a man to take Radlef's place."

CLAWSON looked the gang of men over. Standing in a group that had come down from the planing mill to see what the excitement was about, was a young fellow who was near six foot and built like an artist's model.

"Come here!" called Clawson, motioning to him. The man stepped forward.

"Did you ever fight the bear?"

"Yes, sir, but . . ."

"Then I want you to go on in Radlef's shift."

"I'd rather not do that, sir."

"Rather not! Why?"

"It doesn't pay any more than the job I have, and the work is much harder."

"There is not any hard work for a man built like you," snapped Clawson, scanning the big youngster through narrowed eyes. "Step over here a moment."

Out of earshot of the others' Clawson went on, "What's your name?"

"Melvin Webster. I'm usually called Mel."

"Where do you work?"

"Planing mill."

"How long have you been there?"

"Three months."

"Huh! Funny I never noticed you before. Now, it's like this, Mel. I don't say I'll fire you if you don't do what I want you to do, but it would help me if you'd go on this job until I can get another man for the place. You know as well as I do that it takes a real man to fight the bear. I know it is not the work that you are afraid of. Give me your real reason."

"It's a dangerous job."

"Every place about a sawmill is dangerous. There is no one place more dangerous than any other.

"The first day I came here a bear-fighter disappeared just like Radlef did a while ago, and several others have gone the same way."

"Pooh, pooh! I can see, Mel, that you are not an ignorant drifter, like the common run of mill hands. You don't believe in this mysterious nonsense. You are not going to get scared because some fellow walked off when he had money in his pocket after pay day. Will you go on this job, just to accommodate me?"

"Why, of course, Mr. Clawson, if you put it that way I can't refuse. Still, I'd rather . . ."

"Fine! Just keep your eyes open and you'll be all right. Olsen will show you where the bear-fighters change clothes. Here, Olsen! Here's a partner for you. Show him the way to his job."

CLAWSON stood watching the two giants as they walked away toward the old shed at the east side of the mill. Olsen was a mite the taller and much the heavier of the two, but Mel Webster was clearly the better man physically.

The other men went back to their places, shaking their heads and grum-

bling. The saws started once more.

Clawson turned back toward his office, which was about four hundred yards up the lake shore from the mill, with the planing mill in between. Walking slowly, his dragging limp showed even more plainly than when he ran. At the planing mill he stopped and called the foreman outside. Beyond the deafening racket of machinery.

"I put one of your men, Mel Webster, to fightin the bear," Clawson said.

"All right, if you have to have him, but he's the best man I've got."

"What do you know about him?"

"Know about him? Why, I know he ain't no common riffraff of a mill hand. He don't talk like one and he don't act like one. Still, he knows all about the mill game. Ain't a sign he can't read, nor a job he can't handle."

"Funny I never noticed him before."

"He's a fellow that ain't noticed much. Comes on the job at work time and leaves when the whistle blows. He don't loaf around with the other hands. Lives somewhere in town and don't board with the other men. Bright, intelligent fellow."

"Huh! Can you tell me what a man like that is doing on such a job as this, scarce as real good men are!"

"I don't know. He was out of a job and wanted one, so I hired him. I'd like to have him back as soon as a man can be found for the pit. It don't take no brains to fight the bear."

"I see. Well, we'll need him to fight the bear for a while. It don't take so much brains, but it takes a lot of muscle, and he's got it. Clawson turned away, limped off toward his office.

THE mill stood on the ground that sloped sharply to the east; the lake was north of it. The wall on the east side went clear to the ground, but the mill floor on that side was ten feet above the ground, on a level with the west side.

The big band-saws were run in pairs, with One and Two at the east side of the mill. The bear-fighters for those two saws reached their post by a stair outside the mill, at the east side, entering through a narrow door.

When Webster went up the stair with Olsen, he stopped just inside the door and looked around. It was a room about seven by fifteen feet, running along the outer wall of the mill. The walls were solidly boarded up, except the narrow door, one high, small window, and another door to his left that opened into the mill.

Running along the floor, about three feet from the inner wall of the little room was a three-foot solid wall, capped by heavy timber. Beyond this low wall, which ran the full length of the room, was an open chasm that went down into the darkness beneath the mill.

At the left-hand end of the little chasm, a constant stream of knots, bark and bits of slab came in over a trolley and dropped into the darkness. Webster knew what it was. He had seen them before, but never one just like that. It was the hogpen.

He could hear the growling and snarling of the terrible machine that was called the "hog," far down in the chasm. There was nothing particularly dangerous about that room, yet a glaring new sign bearing the one word, "Danger!" was nailed to the wall.

Of course, if a man should go over that low wall he'd simply fall into the hog, be ground to bits like sawdust and swept on to the fuel bins, lost forever. But who was going to fall over there. Especially, what man who was active enough to be a bear-fighter would fall in there.

True, Radlef had disappeared between the head of those steps and the door to the saw-room that very day, within the hour, in fact—or else there had been some adroit lying done.

Mel turned to his left, climbed the two steps, opened the door and passed into the realm of raging, screaming noise. There no word was spoken; all communication was by signs.

The job that Mel was going to tackle was called fighting a bear, because someone had said that the man who did it was busy as a bear-fighter. He had to stand among a lot of discs and rollers and steer each piece of lumber that came from the two saws into the proper channel. He also had to see that all slabs and waste went onto the trolley feeding the hog.

Stripped to the waist, Mel sprang in among the whirling discs and rollers like a veteran. The big Swede, Olsen, watched him a moment, then went on back down the stairs.

Mel was sure of himself, of his strength. Never did he seem hurried. He disposed of each piece of lumber with ease and waiting for the next when it came. Obviously, he had done the like before. It was plain too, that his level gray eyes would see what went on about him.

BOB CLAWSON'S post had not always been an executive's chair. He was in the middle forties, hard and wiry. Despite his crippled legs, he was an exceedingly active man. There was nothing about a sawmill that he didn't know.

That game leg had been horribly mangled in a mill accident in his youth. Now, he rarely left his private office and came little in contact with his men, except the foremen, who came to his office for orders.

Back in his office, Clawson closed the door and sat down at his desk. There was a deep wrinkle of bewilderment between his eyes. He pulled a memorandum from a pigeonhole in his desk and scanned it

"Just fifteen days apart," he mused. "One every fifteen days, for three months."

Then he entered Radlef's name on the list, numbered it "6" and added the date.

"This can't go on. Sabotage is what it is. Consolidated Mills offered me a mint of money for my holdings and I wouldn't sell."

Suddenly he stiffened in his chair. Mel Webster said he had gone to work in the planing mill the day the first bear-fighter disappeared. It had been the day before that that he had refused to sell his holdings of East Texas pine lands to the big lumber combine.

An idea clicked in his shrewd brain. If the Consolidated people had decided to put him out of business by sabotage, they would select an intelligent man to conduct the onslaught. Mel Webster!

The more he thought of it, the more plausible it looked to him. He had been puzzling over it for weeks, to find some solution to the mystery. At last he had a thread to pull. He'd watch Mel Webster.

When the first two bear-fighters had disappeared, Clawson had really supposed that they just walked off. The men were paid on the first and on the fifteenth of each month. Each time, the disappearance had occurred on the day following pay day.

Even when the third, fourth and fifth disappearance happened, he half-believed that the men had jumped their jobs. It had puzzled him and he had worried over it, but there was nothing that he could do.

Not a trace had ever been found of them. A man caught in machinery would be mangled to death, perhaps, but fragments and blood could be found. Nobody had ever seen the first five men when they disappeared.

This time it was different. He had made light of it to his men, but he knew Radlef had gone into the mill. The man who had told him about it was reliable, a man who prided himself on his truthfulness.

Something had to be done this time. The fiendish regularity with which the men disappeared every fifteen days indicated a shrewd cunning, but he would have to cope with it in some way. This couldn't go on.

Already his men were grumbling among themselves. Soon no one would work in the Clawson mill, which was

probably what the Consolidated wanted.

A heavy step on the porch interrupted his thoughts. The door opened without a knock. Klamp, the day watchman, entered.

KLAMP was a burly giant of a man, well over six feet and broad withal. His long black hair was streaked with silver. His face was dull and expressionless, except for a cold glitter in his black eyes.

Five years before that he had been a sawyer on number 2 saw. A false move lost and mashed his right hand, leaving only the thumb and index finger. Clawson had made him day watchman, at a sawyer's pay, because he had a family.

"What is it, Klamp?" asked Clawson.

"Why, about them danger signs. I put 'em up yesterday like you said to do. This morning they was all down and gone. I couldn't find a one of 'em any place, so I got out some new ones and put them up."

"That was right, but where on earth could the signs have gone?"

"Hog got 'em, I reck'n."

"Nonsense! The hog couldn't get them unless somebody fed them to it. Don't talk such foolishness as that to the men. You'll have them quitting in a bunch."

"I ain't talking it to nobody but you.

The men are talking it among themselves. You think you have been keeping from them about all the men that are disappearin'. They been suspicious; this time they *know*. It ain't nothin' but the hog, I tell you. It got my hand, I reck'n. It never was found." Klamp looked down at his mangled member, frowning blackly.

"Now, Klamp, get that nonsense out of your head. I know it looks odd about those fellows disappearing, but nobody knows that they didn't just walk off and hide, just to throw a scare into the men that wanted to work. Some smart Alec is at the head of this.

"The bear-fighters are the most active men in the plant; and they know the danger spots about a mill as well as you and I, but . . ."

"Yes," rumbled Klamp," as well as we know them. I ain't got but one hand and you got a game leg. That's how well we know the danger spots. There ain't nobody knows the danger spots in a sawmill. Every once in a while a new one shows up and some fellow gets chawed all to rags, killed, or crippled for life, in a place where nobody ever was hurt before. I . . ."

"Never mind, Klamp. I don't want to argue. Some smarty is playing tricks on the Clawson Mill and I mean to catch him. I'm relying on the loyalty of my old hands, such as you, to help me. I'll give you fifty dollars to catch the man who is tearing those signs down."

The giant Klamp grunted and went out. Bob Clawson watched him as he strode across to the mill. Klamp was in his prime and still a giant. Clawson smiled inwardly at what would happen if the athletic Mel Webster ran foul of the old watchman.

In his sawyer days, Klamp had a been a roystering, drinking, gambling fellow with the wildest of them. Losing his hand had changed all that. He was now a morose man, about whom there was no foolishness. But physically, he was still very much of a man.

When Klamp was gone, Clawson went on puzzling over the situation. One thing was sure. If another bear-fighter disappeared, someone would see him go. Klamp would be in that hogpen when the shifts changed, and he, himself, would not be far away.

Mel Webster would stay on that job another fifteen days or he would quit the mill. He had the man right where he wanted him.

BEGAN then a system of close espionage by Clawson, with the limited assistance of old Klamp. The

watchman was an ignorant man and superstitious. He couldn't be told much, but he could be relied upon to do what he was told.

Contrary to his usual custom, Bob Clawson began frequenting the big mill. He was always somewhere in the offing when the shift of bear-fighters for 1 and 2 changed. Nothing out of the ordinary happened.

The plant was running smoothly and the murmuring about the disappearance of Radlef had died out. Apparently no one but himself had noted the regularity with which the men disappeared and that the time was drawing near for another disappearance.

He watched Mel Webster strip in the old shed, noted the powerful muscles of the man. From time to time he spoke a few words to him. Webster was always respectful. Try how he would, Clawson could see nothing to find fault with.

True, there was a veil in his gray eyes, beyond which no man could see. That was not to his discredit. Every shrewd business man had that, and there was no mistaking Mel's shrewdness. Still, Clawson would like to know what was behind that veil.

The tension was beginning to tell on Clawson. Besides the dread of that fatal fifteenth day, ruin was mencing him. Let one more man disappear, and his men would walk out. They would scatter the tale throughout the timber country. The superstitious mill hands would shun Clawson's mill as if it were a pestilence.

Bob Clawson was a game fighter, but he was battling an intangible foe. He knew the Consolidated was after him. Unless he could fasten something on them that would stop them good and hard, they'd get him.

He couldn't sleep. He found himself looking forward to that fatal fifteenth day with all the horror of a man who had been bitten by a rabid dog. Day and night he wondered; wondered—and watched Mel Webster.

THREE nights before the fifteenth day, Clawson was unable to calm himself. His home was a mile from the mill. He thought a walk might quiet his nerves, so he dressed and went to the mill. He felt a premonition that something was wrong there. In vain, he told himself that the night watchman was on the job.

It was near midnight; a waxing moon had almost set. Clawson reached the mill and stole into the deep shadow of a stack of lumber, a short distance from the main door.

He stood there, still as a shadow himself, for nearly half an hour. Then a giant form emerged from the darkness, approached the big door. There were few men who did, or could, walk like that. His step had the spring of an athlete. It was Mel Webster!

Clawson saw him unlock the main door, enter, and close it softly behind him. Clawson's heart was pounding. He had come to the mill unarmed. He was strong and active, but with such a man as Mel Webster, he would have no chance in a hand-to-hand encounter. All he could do was wait until the night watchman came along.

Minutes passed. To Clawson it seemed hours. Finally, the night watchman, who was a small man, appeared. He held up his lantern, saw that the door was unlocked. He cursed volubly at someone's carelessness. Entering, with his swinging lantern, the man went on his rounds of the mill.

Clawson knew the watchman was armed and listened tensely for the sound of a shot. None came. At last the watchman came out, locked the door and went on his way.

Clawson kept still. Half an hour longer he waited. Then the door swung noiselessly open. Mel Webster slipped out, closed and locked the door and stole away in the darkness.

When he was gone, Clawson slipped out into the road and went on back home. His mind was now made up to go to the bottom of this thing himself.

Webster was too smooth for the watchman. He wanted to catch this smooth lad red-handed with the goods. And he'd do it.

He had no fear that the mill would be burned. It was valuable property and the Consolidated people wanted it.

There was no more sleep for him that night. He was at his office an hour before time for the mill to open next morning. He went on to the mill and made a personal inspection before work started. Nothing was amiss. Never had the machinery run more smoothly.

Clawson slept a little by day, then armed himself and kept watch at the mill at night. He didn't get another glimpse of Mel Webster. Two days passed.

THE only noteworthy thing that happened was when the shift changed the next morning after Clawson had seen Mel enter the mill at night. Mel, being the new man, took the first shift. When time came for Olsen to go on at 9:30, Clawson was standing near the old shed, watching, and Olsen said:

"Mr. Clawson, what for you bane watch me all the time, like I'm a dirty thief? Ay bane honest man and don't like . . ."

"I'm not watching you, Olsen. I'm watching somebody else, to protect you."

"Protact me!" laughed the Big Swede. "Ay bane protact myself." He glanced down at his hairy chest, patted his mighty arms. "If anybody try to make me disappear he goes with me, Ay bet you. Nobody is in the hogpen but old Klamp. Stay away from me, or I quit. I won't be watched."

Olsen strode across the runway to the foot of the stair.

"Now, what's the matter with that fool Swede," mused Clawson. "Is he in with the gang that is riding me? Certainly not."

As Olsen disappeared through the door, Clawson sprang up the steps. Old Klamp was not in the little room. No one was there, though he had seen Klamp go up those steps not more than a minute ahead of Olsen.

His heart thumping, Clawson sprang for the door that led into the mill. He bumped into Mel, who was just coming out. Clawson and Mel passed on out to the stairway, where they could hear each other.

"What's the matter, Mr. Clawson? You look excited?" said Mel, calmly.

"Nothing. I just..."

"Where's Klamp? I thought he was always in the hogpen when shifts were made."

"He is supposed to be, but I guess he couldn't make it this time."

Clawson was afraid to question Webster about Klamp, who seemed to have disappeared right before his eyes. At the foot of the steps he turned back, passed through the mill, and went on looking for Klamp. There was so much noise that he couldn't ask questions if he wanted to. He was in a cold sweat when he finally found Klamp standing at the foot of the stairway.

"What the hell are you doing here?" demanded Clawson, his nerves jangling. "Didn't I tell you to be in the hogpen when the shifts changed?"

"Yes," growled Klamp sullenly, "but Olsen told me he'd smash my face if I didn't quit watching him. I don't like...

"It's not what you like, that matters; it's what I want. Be in that room when the shift changes."

MORNING of the fatal fifteenth day came. Clawson's every nerve was tingling. He had slept little, having spent the greater part of the night secretly watching about the plant. If one of his bear-fighters disappeared that day, he was going to know how and why.

Clawson had a pistol and was determined to use it in a showdown. He was at the mill when the day's work started. He went to the old shed at seven o'clock and watched Webster strip and change clothes. He even spoke a few words to the young fellow.

What Mel might, or might not know about the disappearances was indiscernable. If he knew that this was the fatal fifteenth day he gave no indication of it as he walked with springy step across the runway and on up the steps. Mel was at his post before the mill started.

Bob Clawson strolled across and climbed the stairs as soon as Mel was out of sight. He looked into the hogpen. No one was there. Klamp didn't come on until eight. His orders were to be in the hogpen when the shifts changed, at 9:30 and 3:30. All the disappearances had been at the 9:30 shift.

Clawson felt sure that in just two and a half hours the solution of the mystery would be found if he watched closely. And he meant to do that.

As the hour approached, Clawson hid in the old shed. He couldn't watch Olsen openly, after what the Swede had told him. Through a crack in the shed he saw Klamp climb the stairs, to take his place in the hogpen.

The very air was electrical. A matter of minutes would tell the story now. The big Swede crossed the runway, his mighty muscles playing as he walked. He had said he could protect himself; he looked as if he could.

The engine went on running, but all the other machines stopped for a few moments. while the shift was being made. Only the bear-fighters remained at their posts until the relief came, for someone had to be there when the saws started again.

MEL was watching the door that led in from the hogpen. He wondered why Olson didn't come.

Suddenly, above the puffing of the engine and the droning of idle pulleys Mel heard a hoarse, strangling cry. He sprang from the pit and sprinted for the door leading to the hogpen... Burst it open. He heard a slamming noise at the other end of the long narrow room.

His eyes were on a horrible thing. Two great, hairy hands were caught over the heavy timber at the top of the low wall.

Mel sprang for them. He caught one of the big bony wrists just as the other hand slipped from the timber.

With a mighty surge, Mel brought the hand up over his shoulder. He put the last ounce of his strength into the lift. A moment later the limp form of the mighty Olsen clattered to the floor of the narrow passage. Mel stood gasping for breath after his terrific exertion.

From his hiding place, Clawson had heard the hoarse cry. There was no way out of the shed, but a back door. Out that door he sped. He raced around the shed and up the stairs, revolver in hand.

"What's going on here?" he demanded. He stared at Mel, standing over the prone Olsen.

"I—I—don't know," replied Mel, between gasps for breath.

"You don't know! What do you mean?"

"I heard somebody yell, and ran in here. Olsen was hanging by his hands over the hog. I pulled him out and—and—that's all I know.

"What's that on his neck?"

"Why, it's a cord! I hadn't noticed it."

Webster knelt and removed a fine, hard cord from the man's neck, leaving a red welt. The big bear-fighter coughed, sat up, then rose slowly to his feet.

"Who bane done that?" he demanded. "Show him to me and I'll . . ."

"Keep quiet, Olsen," ordered Clawson. "Better go on down to the shed. I'll be there in a minute."

"Better I go on and fight that bear."

The saws had started their screaming. Olsen sprang through the door to his post.

Further conversation was impossible, even in the hogpen, with that infernal din going on.

Clawson pointed to the door and waved with his pistol. Mel backed out the narrow door, but stopped at the head of the stairs.

"Don't leave here!" he screamed in Clawson's ear. "The man who did it is in there somewhere."

"I've got the man I want," yelled Clawson. "Get on down the steps and don't make any break to get away."

"Fool!" cried Webster. "Get out of my way. I'm going back in there." Disregarding the gun, he pushed Clawson aside, entered the room.

Gun in hand, Clawson stood with his back to the door that led on into the mill. He watched Mel. No human voice could be heard in there. All of Clawson's threats and cursing were in vain.

WEBSTER ran along the narrow passage, between the chasm and the outer wall. He recalled that slamming sound that he had heard when he entered the room and saw Olsen so near death. He reached the end of the room, kicked at the planking. At his second kick, two of the boards swung back. In the blackness beyond, two eyes shone like the eyes of a cat.

In a flash a man sprang out. Mel struck and landed, but it was as if he had struck the bole of a tree. Mighty arms reached out and grappled with him in the semi-darkness.

It was a struggle for life or death along that narrow passage. Time and again Mel was lifted clear of the floor. His antagonist tried to throw him to the hog. They gave back.

By the light of the high window Clawson saw that the other man was Klamp! He couldn't understand what had happened. Each time the big watchman lifted Mel clear of the floor he stood in a trance of horror. He did not know which man to help, if he could help. He knew only too well that he would be broken like a straw if he went into that mixup.

Suddenly, with a mighty heave, Mel lifted Klamp clean of the floor. He slammed him down. The big man lay still. Blood ran from his nose. Webster caught up the cord that lay on the floor, bound Klamp's hands. He rolled him out the door and down the steps, bounding down after him.

Clawson followed when he reached the ground, Klamp was sitting up, looking groggily around him.

"Get up," ordered Webster. "Walk over to the shed. Come on, Mr. Clawson, before somebody sees us."

There was no one on that side of the mill at the time. They entered the shed. Then Clawson spoke.

"What does all this mean, Webster?"

"It means several things. There is the man who has been making bear-fighters disappear. He tried to feed Olsen to the hog and I caught him. It means, also, that if the gang finds it out, they'll feed him to the hog."

"What are we going to do with him?"

"Take him quietly to the office and see what he has to say," replied Webster as he put on his clothes.

The three left the shed and walked up the shore of the lake together, unnoticed.

AT the office Clawson closed the door. The three sat down.

"You admit you killed those six men?" asked Clawson abruptly.

"Why not?" growled Klamp sullenly. "No use to deny it. That devil there caught me with the goods."

"How did you do it?"

"Easy enough. I just stood by the side of the door in the hogpen. When they would come in I would throw the cord over their heads, jerk the breath out of them and feed them to the hog."

"But why on earth did you do such a thing?"

"You wouldn't give me my money in a lump when I lost my hand. I wanted to buy a farm. The agent for the Consolidated told me he'd give me ten thousand dollars to make you sell out."

"He didn't tell you to kill men, did he?"

"No. He just said make you sell. And that was the only way I knew. The men would have all quit today if I had got Olsen.

There was a note of pride in the

master murderer's voice. He chuckled in satisfaction.

Clawson looked at him aghast.

"You're mad, Klamp. A sane man would never do a thing like that. Don't you know you'll be hanged?"

"No!" roared Klamp. "I'll follow my hand."

He made a wild spring, was through the door and gone straight for the mill.

"After him!" cried Clawson. "He's crazy as a loon. No telling what he'll do."

But Klamp had the lead and he kept it. Clawson and Webster reached the foot of the steps just as Klamp darted through the door to the hogpen. Five feet from the foot of the stair was an alarm box. Mel jerked it open. Again the siren screamed. The mill stopped, but too late.

Men were coming from every direction now, having seen the three racing for the stair at the east side. Clawson and Mel climbed the steps ahead of the crowd.

Klamp was not in the hogpen. No one was there. An odd look passed between the two. Where was Klamp now? Not in his hidden closet, for they looked there.

IT was midafternoon. Mel and Clawson sat in the office. The mill would run no more that day. An old and trusted employee was dead.

"What are we going to call it?" asked Mel.

"Call it suicide. The man was undoubtedly demented.

Then, after a short silence, "Webster, I want to apologize for suspecting you, but . . . Why have you been going over to the mill at night?"

"I have to plead guilty to espionage, Mr. Clawson, but not with any intention of hurting you or your business. The Consolidated forced my father out of the milling game, stole his holdings, and caused his death. I knew that you were the only big independent left and that they would be after you. I came here and got a job hoping to hang something on them.

"From the time the first men disappeared, I was satisfied that some agent of the Consolidated people was back of it, but I could never get a line on anyone. Then, when Radlef disappeared, I began watching nights. I found Klamp doing strange things and followed him until . . ."

"So that is the way you got on to it?"

"I never did get on to it. I became convinced that Klamp was crooked, but I could never fasten a thing on him. I never would have found that closet if the door hadn't slammed just as I entered the room and saw Olsen's hands."

"Well, you have done me a big service. You can name your price."

"I'm already paid. I came here to get something on the Consolidated that would hold them and I got it."

"What do you mean?"

"This," and Webster laid an envelope on Clawson's desk. "I was the first man down into the hog when we went after Klamp's body. I picked up his old pocketbook. In it was that letter from the agent of the Consolidated to Klamp. It merely says, 'We are still willing to pay you the proposed commission.' But Klamp's reply to it gives the whole thing away and will make the Consolidated come clean."

"Huh! Klamp may have been crazy, but he was shrewd with it. If you hadn't heard Olsen yell, he would have won. They could have bought me out tomorrow, just as he said they could. I don't think you could win anything from the Consolidated with these letters, but if you'll let me keep them, I can make them lay off the Clawson mills.

"That will make your fortune," said Clawson, smiling a little. "Milling is too hard a game for me. I need you in this fight. You can make your own fortune here, and mine at the same time."

A Short Story of Asiatic Seas

THE MISSING LIGHTHOUSE

By WARREN HASTINGS MILLER

Author of "The Arab Dhow," "The Contraband Junk," etc.

Brown-skinned devils with lethal blowpipes swarmed the tilted decks. Captain Jim, back to the wall, fingered a strange and deadly weapon.

"I THINK stop, *tuan!*" cautioned the *serang* at the wheel.

Captain Jim Colvin squidged up his snappy black eyes. He shook his head as he peered through the charthouse panes.

"We'll see it around the next point, *serang*. Steady as you go!" he told the Malay quartermaster at the helm.

You could see nothing. For Sumatra was having her usual evening downpour. It came like a falling geyser, like the cascade from a hose. A thunder of rain beat on the charthouse roof, the decks, the forecastle, and the cuddy aft where Miss Jessie, their sole passenger, slept.

They were in Sikakapa Straits between North and South Pagi Islands, off the Sumatran west coast. But Captain Jim could see nothing of those high limestone hills that hemmed them in on both sides. It was a crooked passage in to Sikakapa. And off Batu Putih cliff was a coral shoal with a light-cairn on it.

"I feel bottom, *tuan.*"

The Malay *serang* stated it as a sensation felt by him through the subtle telegraphy of the wheel spokes. He

knew all the moods of this little iron steamer through years of steering her. He knew just how much way she carried, how much swing.

His liquid Malay tones betrayed no anxiety. The Capman-boss knew he had bottom under him now. He would presently give an order.

Captain Jim laughed incredulously.

"We can see that light on the shoals a quarter of a mile ahead, even through this, *serang!* Where in hell *is* the damn thing, though?" he added, straining his eyes through the white murk of rain outside. The chart said it ought to be in sight.

Captain Jim and his partner, Chief Engineer Johnny Pedlow, did not do a freight business with Sikakapa; instead they traded, legitimate successors of the old brig captains of Conrad's days. They visited these out-of-the-way places exchanging brass cannon, Chinese vases, cotton prints and hardware for crude camphor, cassia, gum-dammar, ebony, benzoin—spicy cargoes that could be sold at good profits in Rangoon and Singapore. This little steamer, of scarce four hundred tons burden, was the partners' home and their living. She was bowling along now at her usual nine knots, Johnny's engine throbbing peacefully as a lamb. Jim worried because the chart said they were overdue on that light. But probably a current was holding them back, he decided.

"Bottom is more and more, *tuan!*" announced Si Tiang at the wheel, his tones now anxious. "You think slow down?"

"All right. Looks queer anyhow—no light!" Captain Jim swung the telegraph to half-speed, still peering ahead for that gleam of light that meant "All's well!"

But he was too late.

SHE crashed sickeningly. She was grinding on and on over the coral before her four hundred tons of momentum could be brought to a stop. Captain Jim made a frantic yank at the engine telegraph for full speed astern, but not in time.

There was no doubt that they had piled up on Batu Putih shoals! Captain Jim's first reaction was an injured and a bewildered disbelief. Dammit, there was no light even yet! You simply *couldn't* pile up on Batu Putih and not see it.

The ship was shaking violently with the reverse of her engines. Captain Jim ran out on the bridge in the downpour. With a flashlight he watched the racing currents from their screw foaming forward along the *Pulo Siburu's* iron side.

Beyond them was still water, the black and shining surface of the lagoon stippled with rain drops. A chip floating on it did not move.

"Hard aground!" groaned Captain Jim. "Of course it had to happen with Miss Jessie aboard."

Tragic seemed their contacts with that woman. Only two months before she had taken passage with them to Sumatra in Rangoon and had been stabbed by a Hindoo miscreant. Captain Jim and Johnny Pedlow had boarded an Arab dhow that time and captured the assassin, after quite an adventure. The honor of the merchant service demanded that no passenger of theirs could be harmed—above all a woman.

And now—well, cuss the luck!

Miss Jessie was a stout and elderly lady from Georgia. She was handsome, with luminous brown eyes and wavy gray hair, an interesting talker and a superb poker player. Every merchant captain in the Eastern Seas knew her.

She would come aboard, casually enough, in almost any port between Mombasa and Saigon, and ask for a stateroom. Merchantmen as a rule hated women aboard, but Miss Jessie was different. She was used to small tramp steamers with perhaps only one white man aboard, was full of entertaining gossip about planters and captains all over the East.

After the usual question, "Ever get seasick, ma'am?" she would come back

with, "Never, young man!" The captain always succumbed, usually with grins. And then long evenings of talk and poker in the cuddy. She was welcome company to lonely men...

"Lower a boat and get out the stern kedge, *serang!*" ordered Captain Jim, coming into the charthouse again. "No use foolin' with the engine any longer. We're on, good and proper. *Damn* that light-keeper!"

He set the telegraph at "Stop." Presently a jeering voice greeted him as its owner came into the charthouse.

"Couldn't you manage to keep off the land jest ten minutes, pinhead? All *you* had to do was to steer her."

It was Johnny Pedlow, Chief Engineer, who had come up from below. He stood, little, scrawny, hook-nosed and green-eyed, eyeing his partner with quizzical disapproval.

"Professor, you get off this bridge or I'll throw you off," barked Captain Jim jocularly. "Wart, I ask you—where in hell's Batu Putih Light? If we're on the shoal 'tain't *my* fault!"

Johnny flattened his nose against a pane. Nothing but rain out there, sheets and curtains of it, falling endlessly straight down, as from a bucket. Not a breath of wind swerved it.

"Lantern's drowned, looks like," he offered. "Maybe they borrowed it to go fishin'. You remember, Hairy Ape, how them Malays ran off with all the spar buoys in Banca Straits to mark their nets?"

"Yah!" raged Captain Jim. "I'll borrow 'em! Wait till the Dutch *controlleur* at Sikakapa hears of this. Lord knows how we're going to get off though, Midget!" he added uneasily. "The tide's only four feet on the Sumatra coast. Even if it's low tide now . . ."

"BOAT ready, *tuan!*"

The *serang* had poked a glistening brown head through the door to announce that. Johnny grabbed for a spare oilskin and sou'wester.

"I'll go with you, Big Boy," he told Captain Jim. "Better take our revolvers along too. If the lantern ain't drowned by this rain, it may mean some funny business."

Captain Jim took the ship's .38 out of its drawer in the chart desk. Both men knew the danger—the wild men of the hills.

The Malays of Sikakapa called them the Orang Ulu, Men of the Jungle. Hairy little men they were, the black aborigines; and fierce, armed with bows, blow-guns and spears. They had established a barrier across the hills a few miles back of Sikakapa. Occasionally they ventured beyond that border—and made trouble.

Johnny ran to his stateroom aft to get a weapon. In a moment he rejoined Captain Jim at the rope ladder head. The boat was below, manned by seminaked *kalassies,* whose muscular bodies glistened in the light of the lantern in her stern sheets.

The big iron stock of the kedge anchor stuck up beyond her stern. It was rigged to let fall by ropes passing under the boat, and a shadowy hawser led off to a chock in the ironwork of the *Siburu's* counter. Their first job was to plant out that kedge astern; the next to row about over the shoal and investigate this mystery of the missing light.

"Oars!" ordered Captain Jim sharply.

The *kalassies* heaved, swung the boat around under the *Siburu's* stern. Yard by yard they dragged the stout hawser.

"Good!" Let go kedge!" sang out Captain Jim. It was at fifty fathoms. A pull at the lashing knots, then they were free of the anchor as it dropped down into deep water below. Its hawser straightened out in a blurred line back to the vague bulk of the *Siburu,* just dimly discernible in the murk of falling rain.

"Keep your eye peeled for the cairn now, Johnny. Give way, men!"

"Captain Jim hauled on the port rudder yoke lanyard and brought the boat

around in a wide sweep. If this was Batu Putih Shoals they could not fail to discover that cairn. It was a simple pyramid of coral lumps, rising some ten feet above mean high tide. Mynheer Kouenhoven, the Dutch *controlleur* at Sikakapa, had caused it to be built and had pensioned an ancient fisherman whose hut was in the cove under Batu Putih to keep a lantern going on it nightly.

Captain Jim was cursing that man who had failed to light the lamp. Johnny grinned. He knew their ship was not lost. It would take some time to hoist out cargo and coal, but she would come all right.

And meanwhile—no cairn! Two wide casts had failed to bring it in sight anywhere. Captain Jim swore at the rain. It continued to pour down in sheets, would let them see nothing of either shore, nor fifty feet beyond the boat. The whole thing was becoming a portentous mystery in Captain Jim's mind. He became more and more sure that they were not on Batu Putih shoals at all, had been driven ashore somewhere along the Straits before some unsuspected current.

"Damn if I know where we are, Mollycule," he growled at Johnny with exasperation." There's no cairn *here!*"

AND then . . . *Bump!*

The boat ran hard on something and stuck there. It was the last straw. Captain Jim blew up volubly. Only Johnny retained his poise. The *kalassies* were wailing; the captain swearing.

Johnny went forward and put a foot over the bow. Then he was standing up, seemingly on the water, knee deep in it. He was using an oar for sounding. It marked an uneven base of rock, ten feet square, in shallow water; deep water beyond it wherever the oar jabbed.

"This is it, Captain," he announced. "*Now* what?"

They stared at each other, amazed. The cairn had been destroyed! All theories as to a negligent keeper went by the board. And no one had torn down the big stone cairn, removing every vistage of it, without an object...

"Thank God for the rain!" ejaculated Johnny with fervor. "We get back to the ship right soon, Captain-boss!" he added energetically. "Tell you my idea of it as we go."

He hopped back into the boat. The *kalassies* gave way with a will. No one wanted to stay there and get shot at from shore. The affair was assuming malignant proportions now. They had been wrecked deliberately and there was more violence to come. That was uppermost in their minds as Johnny began to build his theory.

"It's those natives, Jim," he opened up with conviction. "They've moved the barrier down here. Did-in the poor old light-keeper and tore down the cairn. 'Cause why? Sikakapa's getting prosperous because of us. And the hillbillies have to pay through the nose to them for the suff we bring.

"So they help themselves. Wreck the *Siburu* and loot her. Lot better than collectin' dammar and splittin' up camphor trees in the jungle to get somethin' to trade. We're in for a row the minute this rain lets up and they see the steamer high and dry... You listen to your Uncle John!"

"Looks that way," agreed Captain Jim soberly. "We could serve out the rifles and stand 'em off somehow... But how about Miss Jessie?"

They eyed each other with troubled perplexity as the boat drove alongside the *Siburu* again. A woman on board! That made all the differences in the world when it came to a fight with aboriginal savages. She could not be risked—no passenger of theirs could, in the code of honor of the Merchant Service.

"You go wake her up and tell her to dress, Midget!" said Captain Jim with sudden decision. "One of us will have to stand by the ship; the other rows like hell for Sikakapa with her.

Hop, now! This rain may stop any minute. We ain't got any time to lose."

Johnny did not hop.

"Hol' up a minute, Hairy Ape," he objected. "If you had the brains of a frog you'd know that *that* scheme's no good! All the deck gang but the *serang's* right here in this boat. Send them away with Miss Jessie and you or me, and where are you? No one left on ship but Loy Fun, the cook, Manuel and José, my two oilers down in the engine room, and three no-'count nigger firemen. It would be a massacre, first attack!"

"Well?" demanded Captain Jim testily. "What else can we do?"

"Abandon ship, all hands," said Johnny practically. "Both boats. Let 'em loot the cargo if they want to. Big loss to us. But *she's* safe, see? We can stand it. What's a few thousand dollars loss compared to the lives of our people? And we'll be back with the *controlleur* and his constabulary before they can do much harm to the ship."

JOHNNY was gone up the ladder while Captain Jim was still expostulating. Give up the ship tamely? No fight, no nothin'? It went hard with Captain Jim's combative nature. But Johnny, damn him, was right!

The Orang Ulu would not get far with the loot before they would be back with a strong force of native constabulary. And then there could be enough fighting—with Miss Jessie safe in Sikakapa.

That last decided Captain Jim. He went up to the charthouse with his *kalassies* in tow. Immediately he began serving out rifles and cartridges. It was necessary to arm them, in any event, for the mere row up the straits to Sikakapa. No one knew now whether this was a mere looting enterprise of the blacks or a first-class insurrection broken loose on the island.

Johnny joined him presently.

"Good work, Jim!" he approved. "I see the *serang's* lowering our other boat. She'll be up in a few minutes."

Then Miss Jessie herself barged into the charthouse. Her big brown eyes looked on them both inquiringly under the tropical topee she wore. Good boys they were, to her, officers of the merchant service, with whom Miss Jessie trusted herself implicitly. Their chivalry, their devotion in times of danger, had never yet failed her.

"It's this way, Miss Jessie," announced Captain Jim. "We're aground on Batu Putih Shoals, see? Don't know when we can get her off; but the lighthouse cairn's gone and it's piled us up good and proper. Looks like some native funny business. We may be attacked as soon as the rain lets up. Wild men. Alfuros. You know. . . .

"So we're taking to the boats while there's time. Row you up to Sikakapa and get some help there. Too bad it's going to be a rainy trip for you. But they can't shoot at us from shore while it lasts, you see. . . . Is your trunk ready? I'm sending a *kalassi* for it right off if you don't mind."

Miss Jessie sniffed. "Give me one of those rifles, please, Captain."

She ordered it in that resonant, determined voice of hers and advanced to take one as she spoke.

"You mean to tell me you're going to abandon this ship because a parcel of natives threaten some fancied danger to *me?* Good Lord, boys, I've been shot at, stoned, arrowed and javelined more times than either of you are years old!"

A smile broke as she picked up the rifle and snapped open its breech. She was used to it. Handsome she certainly was, for all her silver hair. And brave, a true daughter of Georgia; also forceful and commanding. She was going to be difficult to deal with.

"You don't understand, Miss Jessie!" fumed Captain Jim helplessly. "A woman on board—it's like a red rag to a bull with these natives. *Their* women will want your jewelry, your clothes—everything you've got, see? They'll egg

on their men somethin' fierce. One sight of you on board!

"Please let me help you down into the boat. Johnny and me, we talked it over and it's the best thing to do. Let 'em loot the cargo, this trip. Once we've got you safe in Sikakapa we can come back and give 'em a run for their plunder. . . ."

"*Good* boys!" interrupted Miss Jessie, her eyes softening. "Kind of you, but . . . Got a pair of overalls?" she asked sweetly. She did not wait for them to produce any, but snatched an oilskin pair off the hooks and vanished into Captain Jim's stateroom.

IN a moment she was back, transformed. A man, at distant view, the bib of the oilskins coming up above her bosom, straps going over her shoulders. In one motion she had replaced the topee with a sou'wester and now looked like any of them.

"*Now!*" she said triumphantly, resuming the rifle. "How do I look?"

That feminine query she could not resist. Their eyes told her she looked very well; quite a bosun in fact, as Captain Jim remarked.

"We stay right here and fight them off," said Miss Jessie. "If you boys dreamed that I would let you give up your cargo to the first robbers that came along, you didn't know me!" she declared stoutly.

The partners succumbed. One more white man to help fight the ship, that was what she amounted to practically. With Manuel and José, that made five of them, and the *serang* was almost as good as another.

The rest of the Lascars you could tell nothing about. They might leap over the rail when the attack came and swim for shore. At least they would fire a few shots apiece before it came to close quarters.

And then the rain stopped suddenly, as is the way with tropical downpours. They heard it roaring off over the jungle ashore. Then there was mist, a dank, steaming, dead stillness over all the water, while slowly the outlines of the mountain crests on both sides of the straits revealed themselves against the lowering clouds.

It argued dawn coming. The white face of Batu Putih cliff rose ghostly out of the gloom of the cove; its rim, two hundred feet above the steamer, fringed with pandanus, the familiar "screw pine" of seaside tropical vegetation. A lone areca palm like an immensely tall broom handle with a tuft of foliage atop showed in the cove as daylight grew then the mangroves, a dense fringe of them lining the shore.

They were on the Batu Putih coral reef, aground in that placid basin of the straits which was surrounded on all sides by high rocky eminences. They had been wrecked deliberately. All three were out on the bridge now, scanning those mangroves for signs of hostile canoes.

"Come here, boys. There's one! See it?" It was Miss Jessie who first spied anything suspicious in those mangroves. She was standing in the starboard bridge, pointing. The bank of gleaming mangrove leaves in the faint dawn seemed solid, but it was not. Out of the low bushes there protruded a black prow, pointed, high, adorned with some sort of carving that made a blur at the head of the stem.

"Golly, there's another!" cried Johnny suddenly and directed their eyes a short distance to the right of the other.

"Yep, and still another!" concurred Captain Jim. "Dynamite, Johnny! We can't begin to hold those birds with just eight rifles."

COUNTING the three proas already spotted at twenty-five fighting men each, it looked serious. Captain Jim got the key of the storeroom and he and Johnny hurried below for a stock of dynamite sticks. These were seldom used, except in New Guinea waters, but they would come in right handy now.

Armed with blowguns, bows and

javelins, the little wild men of the island would be formidable because of their sheer numbers. There was no doubt now that they had wrecked the *Siburu* with an attack for loot as the object.

Only the heavy rain had saved the ship from an immediate scrimmage when she crashed. You could not shoot a light sumpitan dart through a heavy rain with any chance for accuracy. . . .

Captain Jim handed Johnny some cigars as they divided the white paper sticks.

"Light up, Wart," he said. "You'll need a punk in your face when those gazabos get up close. The fuses are five-second. Count three, then toss into the proa nearest. Ought to fix 'em! . . .

"And say; we've got to get *her* out of this somehow. It's us white men they'll go for hardest. She'll get everything they've got, same as us. She's a spirited old gal, so there's no use trying to post her in any safe place. She'll want to be right in the thick of it. And then one of them poisoned darts comes along. . . ."

Johnny considered a minute, agreeing with him. But you had to be subtle about it. Miss Jessie would turn down flat any place they showed her that looked at all like hiding her away.

"How about the crowsnest?" he asked. "It's up out of the worst of it. And she can have a fine time pluggin' down at 'em. We can tell her it's the post of honor, like."

"It's no use; you've sure got the brains of this outfit, Johnny," agreed Captain Jim admiringly. "Only one thing wrong with it; she's separated from us and will be left up there high and dry if they take the ship. But it looks like the best that can be done. Durn a woman aboard, anyhow!"

She certainly was a problem to them, with a rough and tumble fight coming on. But diplomatically they returned to the bridge and suggested posting her up in the crowsnest on the forward mast. It was iron, a sort of boot four feet high, and was used mostly in spotting coral shoals when sounding their way in through little-charted reefs.

"You've got the best eyes of the lot of us, ma'am," added Captain Jim. "You'll warn us if there's anything doin'. Plug the chiefs as they come out. Any guy with an extra lot of feathers on him. . . ."

Miss Jessie smiled on them with that poker smile of hers. You never could tell whether she held four aces or a bob-tailed flush.

"Good grief!" she laughed, with a distasteful look over at the crowsnest. What was really worrying her was appearing on deck among all those men of the crew in this male attire. It was all right up here on the bridge with the two boys. But she conquered it presently.

"I'm much too fat to get into that thing up there," she demurred whimsically. "And it's poor strategy to divide our forces, if you ask me. However. . . ."

There was daring in her eyes as she looked up at that tempting position while being escorted down on deck by Captain Jim. It was the key to the ship, in fact. Anyone up there commanded everything below, could sweep the decks so long as he could shoot.

It was that side of it that seemed to appeal to her as she put foot on the iron ladder leading up to the crowsnest. The motherly instinct, up some place where she could protect these boys and their ship.

SHE had hardly started up when a barbaric howl followed by a malignant burst of screeches and war-whoops resounded from all the heights about the cove. It was gray dawn now. The Orang Ulu had evidently camped for the night somewhere above the mosquito zone. The sight of their prey hard and fast on the coral had brought that triumphant shout.

Down through the bush for their boats they were now leaping. The pale

blades of javelins, the long shining lines of their blowguns were visible in the foliage.

"Good luck to us, Captain. Here they come!" said Miss Jessie with grim cheerfulness. She hurried up the ladder to her station.

Captain Jim ran back for the bridge, posting the *serang* with four *kalassies* on each side of the forward well-deck bulwarks as he went. There was commotion now in the mangroves, a fierce mutter of savage and eager voices.

Then the three black canoes appeared. They were fifty feet long and crowded densely with fighting men, paddles flashing along their sides. Ranks of long sumpitans lay out in a fringe at high angle as they came swiftly at the ship from three sides, a restless forest of spears glittering in each.

The ship broke out with a loud, smashing fire before they had hardly cleared the mangroves. Old Remington .45-70's with a heavy 200-grain bullet, the ship's arms-rack consisted of; slow, but doing abundant execution as those slugs plunged into the dense masses of black savages.

Paddlers fell. Their oars were snatched up by others. On they swooped, two minutes away.

"Take the boat to port, Johnny. Time for the sticks!" shouted Captain Jim through the din. He ran for the starboard end of the bridge. A dynamite cylinder was in his hand.

Showers of poison darts were crossing and recrossing the ship by now. They flashed low over the gunwale, tinkled with the shock of bamboo on steel against the bulwark wall opposite. The bridge hissed with them, jabbing through the canvas, sticking in the woodwork. One, missing Johnny by inches, struck with a soft *Putt!* in Captain Jim's jacket. He snatched the deadly thing out. One scratch of its point probably would have killed him. Captain Jim was grinning fiercely.

He looked over the rail. The proa on his side was not forty yards off. A babel of fierce yells came from her, javelin-men stood eagerly on the thwarts, their weapons poised. Captain Jim knew they could split a bamboo staff at thirty yards, so accurate were they with them. He could not be sure of the dynamite under twenty.

A savage in a feather mask in her stern lifted a musket. He was aiming up at Miss Jessie in the crowsnest. It was either the rifle or the dynamite damn quick if he wanted to save her! She herself was too busy firing at the third proa somewhere beyond their bows to be aware of this miscreant.

The rifle! decided Captain Jim.

He whipped it up and fired snapshot as he would a shotgun. The Singapore musket went off with a loud crash, but he had no time to see what happened.

FOUR javelins sliced through the air at him, hungry steel that made him duck below the bridge woodwork. Over where his head had just been two of them flashed, stuck beyond with a singing whine in the oak of the runway. Two more pierced the siding of the starboard bridge guard, gleamed like a pair of daggers not a foot from his face.

He crouched. Overside he heard vindictive yells from both sides of the ship, a high-pitched, keening, savage cry of triumph. There were shots in reply from the after well where Manuel and José had the defense; forward, not a sound, not even from Miss Jessie.

"Get busy, Cap!"

The skipper heard through the din that terrier bark from Johnny at the other end of the bridge. He saw him rise suddenly with a sputtering cartridge in hand, heard almost instantly its deafening detonation over the lagoon below.

Captain Jim was fumbling with his own dynamite stick. Aggravatingly it refused to "take" from his cigar end. Seconds were precious now. The cussedness of inanimate things! Captain Jim raved and swore.

He picked at the fuse, but its seal was stubborn, overdone by some zealous workman. No sputter came from it. Then a heavy shock through the iron-work on his side told him that the proa was alongside and her savages boarding the *Siburu*.

"Hey!" he heard Johnny thunder as he came running over. "Gimme it! You take my gun!"

He had snatched the cylinder and thrust his revolver into Captain Jim's hand. The skipper rose double-armed and faced aft, leaving Johnny to deal with the refractory cartridge. It had about lost them the ship, damn it!

The after well now flashed with the wavy steel of krisses. It was a huddle of naked and glistening black men who were spreading in a tide all over the decks. Into them Captain Jim let go with both revolvers as fast as he could pick a man and fire.

It was all hopeless, he soon realized. Manuel and his firemen had retreated down into the engine room at their first onset.

With barbarous shouts the mob now charged that lone white man on the bridge. Immediately they were under cover of the superstructure, at the bridge steps in a bristle of javelin blades. Captain Jim fired down into the bodies leaping up at him. A fury of desperation was induced in him by these flaming krisses, the fierce and murderous faces rising at him like a sea. Then a click told him that that revolver was empty.

He shifted guns. No, it woudn't do; there was only a shot or two left in that also! And it was essential to get time to reload. He leaped across the steps-well, gained the chart-room and slammed its door. Immediately the bridge behind him was possessed of them, pouring up as through a gap in a dam.

HE had a hard-breathing moment or two to reload. Menacing, diabolical faces outside the glass were looking in. But it did not seem to occur to them that this hard and transparent surface could be broken. They were hurling their weight against the door. It was stout, meant to withstand heavy seas.

It looked utterly hopeless now to Captain Jim, and he was cursing vividly the woman on board for whose sake he had sacrificed precious seconds with that dynamite fuse. Damn it, you just *couldn't* run a ship in these regions hampered by even Miss Jessie!

He glanced up at the crowsnest, but there was no sign of her. That ruffian with the musket had got her, after all, with a lucky shot. It had been all in vain, that delay of his to protect her. And they had lost the ship.

The fore-well swarmed with the wild hill-billies. No sign of Johnny, the *serang*, any of the *Siburu's* people down there! Captain Jim shoved in the last cartridge and snapped back the cylinder with the notion that he was the sole survivor of this ship's company. Well, they'd not take *him* alive, to torture at leisure!

He had not been two minutes with those revolvers. Both chart-room doors were creaking under the heavy impact of bodies, but were holding well. And then one of them tried a tentative jab with his javelin at the glass. He raised a yell of triumph as the pane broke in before the steel. Him Captain Jim shot down; grim, at bay.

Backing toward the after wall so he could command the entire front, he raised both guns. All of them were jabbing at the panes now. There was a din of splintering and falling glass. The stateroom as a last resort, thought Captain Jim as he opened fire on them. Could jump in there and hold it, for a time. . .

AND then the turning point came, like a whip-lash. The shout of Johnny's voice —"Yee-ay, Cap! *Look out!*"—pierced through the uproar. And Captain Jim saw him on the forecastle, that sputtering stick of dynamite in

hand. At last it was lighted and poised to throw.

The next second it was coming through the air over the fore-well. Captain Jim dodged a slithering javelin. He ducked into his stateroom. He did not want to be anywhere around when *that* thing went off!

A tremendous concussion occurred outside. Showers of glass pelted against the after charthouse wall. Human shrieks and groans fell to a sudden silence. Then the bark of rifles broke out again.

Captain Jim dashed out through the wreck of his charthouse to aid in that final effort to regain the ship. He found the bridge swept clear. Canvas, siding, stanchions, the mob of wreckers, all were blown to shreds. Below in the fore-well were black bodies in heaps, a few maimed survivors trying to crawl over the rail.

The *serang* and two *kalassies* were shooting at them from the forecastle deck. Their victory seemed complete. Johnny had held that cartridge to the last instant—to save their deck, which it would have blown in—but its execution in midair had been appalling, devastating.

"Anything left of her, Jim?" Johnny's voice was apologetic and anxious. He stood now up on the capstan gear scanning the after deck beyond Captain Jim for more of the enemy. "I jest *had* to let th' ole cannon-cracker loose, Big Son. You seemed some crowded in there t' me! So I sorter had to clear the decks . . ."

"*You!*—Wart!" Captain Jim pranced clear around taking in a glance over his whole ship before he could find the right words. Same old Johnny! He'd win the whole fight for you, and then worry over a smashed steering-wheel or something equally unimportant. And they *had* won.

Manuel and his gang had come out on the after deck and were rushing the last of the Alfuros overboard there, that glance astern had told Captain Jim. Forward the *serang* was pursuing with busy Remingtons the two surviving and depopulated canoes. They were heading down the straits for the sea entrance, having had enough of this particular steamer.

It was a bizarre scene. . . . The two rakish proas paddling away in all haste under the urge of a turbanned and brawny black crew; the chunky iron steamer spitting smoke and fire at them from her rails; the placid lagoon with tangled and silent green jungle draped all around it, on a backdrop of limestone cliffs. . . .

But Captain Jim was accustomed to that sort of thing. Now he was searching his soul for epithets wherewith to kid Johnny.

"Yah! You *had* to clear the decks, you did, Midget!" he whooped joyously. "Wreck me charthouse; blow kingdom-come out'n all those misguided niggers; win the whole war. You come over here, Johnny, before I smack you flat."

Johnny grinned diabolically.

"Yeah? Grateful guy!" he commented. "Next time I throw one of them bokays I'll git you where you can't dodge it, y'ole fool!"

Thus the congratulations on their victory. Johnny broke off the exchange of affectionate insults.

"Can it, tripe!" he said suddenly. "Ain't we *never* goin' to do nothin about Miss Jessie? She's up there yet. 'Fraid she's hurted bad."

CAPTAIN JIM gaped. He was not used to having women aboard and, to tell the truth, had about forgotten her in the concentration of dealing appropriately with Johnny and looking over what was left after that blizzard of dynamite struck. Johnny was now at the foot of the foremast. He announced blood drops on deck with a cry of pitying alarm.

"Pore old soul! Hustle, Jim!" he called and ran up the grab irons.

Captain Jim sprang down on deck to follow him. The crowsnest was dented

all over with bullet marks. There must have been a quart of slugs and a hatful of powder in that musket. And one had touched her somewhere. . . . *Not* such a safe place, after all, their scheming.

They arrived nearly together, dreading the worst. Miss Jessie had collapsed into the boot, a pathetic huddle of blood-stained oil-skins. And, a woman. It seemed sacreligious to those two case-hardened sea dogs. A fight was no place for any woman, take it how you would! Something too sacred to be mixed in with men's ignoble broils. . . .

"Easy now, Johnny. . . . Get her up over my shoulder. Good. You take her feet."

They were getting her down, carefully. All they could do was hope. She had passed out completely; but a woman's nervous organization was that way with bullets. It might be nothing serious. . . .

A body of men carried her aft to the cuddy, men in a double row, moving ever so carefully. The *kalassies* were telling in low tones how she had helped them stand off that third proa with shot after shot. The bullet hole that Captain Jim and Johnny had discovered and bandaged was in the back of her shoulder, witness that she was still busy with the oncoming proa when hit. She had never seen that miscreant with the musket.

They were awkwardly trying to make her comfortable in her berth when Miss Jessie at last opened her eyes. She looked up at the partners with the old familiar vigor. There was pain there, abundant; but her dominant will was setting all that to one side. Interest and inquiry came into her eyes.

"Did we whip them?" She spoke with laboring breath.

"Sure did, Miss Jessie!" chorused the partners eagerly.

"Johnny, here. . . ." Captain Jim began, but Johnny kicked him and went on:

"*You* won the war, Miss Jessie! If it hadn't been for you standin' off that third proa! Jim an' me took care of the other two, but . . . Well, you done fine, I'll say! Now all you got to do is to get over that little tetch."

He was confident as any doctor, was Johnny. Miss Jessie looked up at him steadily with that poker stare of hers. Then she smiled at Captain Jim.

"He's an outrageous liar, Captain!" she said with mock severity. "Something knocked the life out of me up there and I collapsed into the boot. But I heard a terrible row below and thought it was all up with us. And then— *Boom!*— Dynamite! Bet *he* did it! As for me and my part—stuff and nonsense!"

Well, there was nothing serious the matter with her if she could go on like that. The wound would heal with time and care.

"Just our luck, ma'am, to run you into a thing like this, though," apologized Captain Jim after telling her of Johnny's last stand with that dynamite stick.

"*Shoo!*" said Miss Jessie. "Wouldn't have missed it for worlds. You boys get out! Time to look after the ship. . . . I think she's moving."

THERE came another almost imperceptible movement. There was a palpable suggestion of buoyancy, sensed rather than felt under foot.

"The tide!" exclaimed Captain Jim. "We haven't had time to do much figurin' on it, but . . . Do you mind if we leave you now, Miss Jessie? Four feet of rise ain't much, but for a little ship like this. . . ."

It was plenty to lift clear a four hundred tonner driven on hard coral. And it was busy at the ship now. It had been silently swelling the lagoon and flooding all the inlets and backwaters while mere men were at their old work of loot and defense against the looter.

"There!" Miss Jessie said. "Go now, boys! I promise to get well if you get the ship off."

Then there came a whole series of bumps. Through the porthole the palms ashore seemed moving. In reality it was that stern hawser drawing the ship off with the shrink and slack of rope.

"Take it easy, Miss Jessie! She's goin'!" announced Captain Jim after that look. "Come on, Johnny!"

He hastened up to his wrecked chart-house. The *Siburu* was in mid-straits now. The *serang* was hauling in on the hawser.

She probably leaked and would need docking; but it didn't matter. The wheel-post had withstood that dynamite blast, so he found that he could steer. The telegraph standard, being brass, was not much damaged—after you got a mess of window-frames and mullions off it. Oh, well, she was afloat and that was the big thing!

THE battered steamer came into Sikakapa that afternoon. She had a distinctly Malayan tale to tell.

And the setting of it was appropriate—a village of palm-thatch houses and godowns, all on piles out over the harbor water, canoes for the sole method of visiting about, dense green jungle crowding the town to the very water's edge. A fringe of leaning coconut palms lined a coral sand beach that was strewn with proas hauled out on the shore.

And a perspiring and lonely white man heard the tale of his mistreated lighthouse with sputters of Dutch indignation.

"*Bei* damn!" he said. "Dem Alfuros again, no? I fix 'em, diss time! . . . And a lady who iss wounded? You should not have bring her to an uncivilized place like diss, Captain!" said Mynheer Kouenhoven, the *controlleur,* reproachfully.

Captain Jim wished he hadn't, too. But when he and Johnny saw her again that evening, sitting up cheerful and contained and asking for a deck of cards, they did not regret the adventure so much. She was Miss Jessie, you see. Not an ordinary passenger by a long sight!

WHEN THEY BOLOED MAGELLAN

MAGELLAN, whose name has gone down in history as the first man to circumnavigate the globe—although it was one of his navigators who completed the voyage—was the first white man to meet death by a *bolo* wound. This was in 1521 on the island of Mactan in the Philippines. The details of the famous commander's death were written by Pigafetta, who was with Magellan and kept a log of the trip.

Magellan was attempting to subdue a Filipino chieftain who had molested one of Magellan's native friends. Magellan set out in canoes with forty-nine white men. All were armed with harquebusses and cross-bows. They paddled to the village of the insurgent chief. There Magellan's men had to abandon their leg armor to wade ashore.

The white men met a desperate defense. The natives displayed little fear of the crude firearms. And they showered the invaders with arrows. Magellan was wounded in the face with a spear. Before he could draw his sword, a native was on him. He slashed the white man's legs with a *bolo.* Magellan toppled and fell. Lances finished him before comrades could reach his side.

For the first time in history the deadly chopping blade of the Philippines, which has sent so many Americans to their long rest, got in its work on a member of the Caucasian race.

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An Animal Story in America's Wilds

SWAMP OF THE SPEARMEN

By

KENNETH GILBERT

The marshes ran red with blood of the feathered fledglings. Furry killers clawed the nests. . . . Then the lords of the flock swooped—with amazing battle arms.

THE flames of sunset were dying in the western sky; the June moon hung round and mellow over the hills. It was then that the great swamp awoke and bestirred itself.

By day it was a desolate spot, suggesting all that is wild and untouched by the hand of Man. There were hundreds of acres of it—bunch-grass with pools of brown water, some of it scummed with green duck-weed; sparse stands of tamaracks, many of them dead and barkless; here and there the stub of cedar which had tried to survive in the moist muck, but which had been drowned out by persistent floods.

Even the vegetation-choked stream which wound beneath gnarled roots and between the hummocks seemed to sleep as it crossed the swamp. Not until it reached the cool, green forest beyond did it awaken. Then it sang musically as it brawled over stones.

But in the swamp all things slept, save the brown marsh-hawk who quartered it regularly each day, but even his circling seemed drowsy and listless. The swamp seemed the embodiment of death.

Yet with the coming of night, all this was changed. The moonlight which washed over the place transformed it magically. The rushes seemed turned to silver, the trees took spectral forms, and the ordinary harshness was softened.

Life, too, awoke. There was the thin piping of small green frogs, answered by deeper, guttural voices of a larger species; an occasional loud splashing as some muskrat plunged off his feeding-

bench and started homeward. Then, presently the voices of the Spearmen were heard.

Of all sounds in the swamp, these were the weirdest—harsh, unmusical, a succession of kr-r-rks! and then hoarse screams. Great wings beat heavily and dark, elongated shapes moved against the face of the moon. The Spearmen were abroad, ready to gather their night's harvest.

For the swamp was the home of many blue herons. By day these great birds usually kept out of sight in the grass, although an observer with sharp eyes might have seen here and there a moveless, postlike figure as a male bird stood watch beside a nest, or maintained vigil at some favorite fishing-pool.

For the most part, however, the herons kept out of sight, during sunlight hours, for the food upon which they largely subsisted—big frogs and small—likewise remained hidden. But as darkness fell and the unwary frogs gave way to the desire to locate friends in adjacent pools by calling to them, the herons bestirred themselves. They knew that the hunting would be good.

There were nearly a hundred nests in the heronry—homes of tall, steel-blue birds with stilt-like legs, long necks and long beaks. These nests were as a rule built in the tamaracks, although they could likewise be found on the rounded tops of barberry thickets. Rude collections of sticks they were, seemingly placed in haphazard fashion, yet with a degree of skill, for they withstood the fierce summer storms which swept down out of the Coast Range just to the westward.

Usually one parent stood guard at the nest while the other was away fishing for frogs, trout or suckers in the creek, and even salamanders and snakes among the damp grasses. Each nest had from three to six fledglings, gawky birds all beak, legs and appetite.

Just how long the heronry had been located in this swamp no man could say. Few indeed were the human beings who had seen it.

CERTAINLY it was the home of many herons when Krog was born, for he had chipped his natal shell in this very place. Years had passed since that day, with Krog gaining size, strength and wisdom, until now the great blue heron, who stood nearly five feet tall, had become ruler of this clan of the Spearmen.

None was wiser than he, nor a more skilful hunter. For long periods he could remain unmoving beside his favorite fishing-pool, his neck curved in the form of a letter S. The long, yellowish spear-like beak would be tilted upward and to one side, so that with one eye he could scan the heavens, while with the other he could mark the approach of an unwary trout. He would remain motionless for so long that he would seem to be a weathered snag sticking above the grass.

Then, suddenly, he would go into action. He could gauge to a fraction of an inch his striking range. The instant the trout swam within it, the fish was as good as dead. A lightning-like movement of that long neck, a downthrust of the sharp beak, and the hapless fish would be neatly inpaled.

Thus for countless ages had the Spearmen lived in content in the swamp, rearing their young and fulfilling their individual destinies according to nature's dictate. . . . A peaceful existence, for they waged no war save upon the creatures which were their natural food; a much *too* peaceful existence, for nature never allows her children to remain contented for long.

Indeed, as Krog took off now from the biggest tamarack, where his nest was hidden, to beat his way steadily over the moonlit swamp to a pool where frogs were usually plentiful, he may have sensed that a change was about to take place. There was no visible evidence of danger, yet no swamp-dweller failed to sense it.

Some forewarning of menace had come. But even Krog, big and wise though he was, did not know what it could be.

BACK up in the foothills, perhaps ten miles from the swamp, a curious thing was taking place. A thick stand of fir, which until then had seemed lifeless, now suddenly became peopled with odd little wild folk, about two feet in length, brown-furred and with an orange-red throat.

They resembled large weasels. They did, in fact, belong to the same family. They were pine martens and they were on one of those migrations which take place apparently without reason every few years.

Although this was a season when females were rearing their young, the males of the clan evidently decided to move on to a new range. This might be a hundred or two hundred miles from the region which they had customarily inhabited, but it made no particular difference so long as food was plentiful.

There were literally hundreds of them in the migration, perhaps thousands. They moved forward like an invincible army, annihilating all small game in their path. Where the martens passed there remained no mice, no chipmunks, squirrels or broods of grouse or other birds. They were like locusts, leaving no life behind them.

And they came without warning, running up and down tree trunks, leaping from one branch to another and investigating every tree and every foot of ground for possible food. Thus in the firs they found a squirrel's nest with four little ones in it.

The mother was there, looking after her youngsters, when the martens came. The father had ventured out this night to visit a cache of food which he had apparently forgotten during the winter. He was busy shucking a fir cone, that he might obtain the edible seeds embedded in the shell, when the grinning mask of a marten came around the bole of a tree scarcely six feet away.

The squirrel, terror in his heart, for he knew that he was doomed, sprang wildly for the trunk of the nearest tree. He went racing skyward. At his heels came the marten, running as easily and as lightly as he.

The squirrel gained the top of the tree and launched himself in an arrowy leap for the depths of a big cedar. Yet, as though tied to him by an invisible bond, the marten duplicated the feat. Around and around the trunk they went, the squirrel shrilling its fear.

And then, hopelessly, the squirrel conceived the idea of returning to its home, as though safety lay there. Perhaps within the depths of the nest, the squirrel could turn at bay and make a momentary stand.

Still keeping two jumps ahead of the marten, the squirrel ran up the nest-tree, but as the bulky nest loomed in sight, the little rodent halted in dismay. For the head of another marten appeared at the mouth of the nest. It licked its chops suggestively.

The squirrel knew instinctively that its family was dead. Moreover, that slight pause proved fatal, for the pursuing marten reached the squirrel so quickly that the latter never knew what happened. He died without even a protesting squeak.

SO it went for the smaller of the furred kindred. The golden-throated demons were everywhere. Three of them even had the effrontery to attack a great horned owl who, seated on top of a stub, heard the scratching of their claws as they ran up the bole, but believed it to be a squirrel. Ere the owl could take flight, one of the furred fiends had struck him under the left wing, where a great artery runs close to the skin.

With beak and talons the owl slew the second assassin, but a third seized him. The battlers dropped from the stub to the ground, where death came swiftly to the big bird of prey. In his time, the

owl had slain many marten, and now the clan was being revenged upon him, for their strength lay in numbers.

A grouse, mothering her brood beneath the shelter of a salal thicket, *kwit-kwitted* warning to her youngsters as she heard the light patter of many feet on fallen needles and leaves. But before she could flutter off, in semblance of being hurt, that the assassins might be drawn to her instead of her chicks, a pair of ravenous marten plunged into the thicket.

There they paused long enough to slay the last chick, in addition to the mother, and to snarl fiendishly at each other over the meat. Wolfing their skill, they went on after their fellows.

From a hollow log, where it had taken refuge, a rabbit already in its summer coat of brown, was dragged and murdered on the spot. Within two minutes the marten which swarmed over the prey had left only a patch of stained fur to mark the spot where the rabbit died. Again they went on, the pattering of their feet like fine rain falling on crisp leaves.

Ahead of them, fear in her heart, ran a mule-deer doe, a month-old fawn galloping at her side. The doe knew that she could escape the furred bravos swarming through the trees and along the ground, but the fawn would fall a comparatively easy victim to their insatiate blood-lust.

They managed to cross a creek and then, after a short pause, for the fawn quickly became winded, they sprinted again. And so on, until they passed out of the region which the marten were devastating.

From the depths of a thicket, where he had been industriously prospecting for grubs, a morose old black bear discovered that he was surrounded by hundreds of the furred demons, their eyes like red sparks as they glared at him. The bear, uneasy despite his size, snarled hatred and defiance of the killers, but he was glad, nevertheless, when they vanished as though by magic, convinced that he was too powerful a beast to be attacked.

The horde likewise startled out of a thicket a half-grown lynx, which bounded away as though shod with swan's-down. Ordinarily, the lynx would have taken refuge in a tree, but it understood the ways of marten, and had no desire to be trapped thus by an army of the small murderers. It, too, fled in the direction the doe and fawn had gone.

THE marten kept on. And an hour before dawn, still unwearied from their crimes, they came to the big swamp.

As though doubtful whether to cross this murky, uncertain ground, or to avoid the place entirely, the big boar-marten who seemed to have fitted into the role of leadership by reason of his size and ferocity, ran up a tree which overlooked the swamp. From this point surveyed the place.

The big marten had slain many animals and birds that night. His catlike chops were stained, but he was still hungry, and there was in him the killing urge of the weasel clan, which will not stop doing murder so long as a victim remains.

Even then the marten might have led his cutthroats around the swamp, if there had not come to him the clamorous call of fledgling herons. His keen eyes likewise discerned the ungainly parents flying about the swamp, returning to the nest with food, or bound on a quest for it.

In a flash he understood. Where there were so many fledglings, there was much murder to be done. Licking his chops, he ran lightly down the tree and began to thread his way through the maze of tall grass, his grim followers after him.

Forty feet from the edge of the swamp, there was a startled *kr-ruk!* A brownish bird with a long beak fluttered out of a clump of water alders. This was one of a pair of bitterns which

nested regularly in the swamp. Although smaller than the blue herons, they were of the same species and their presence was tolerated.

Now the mother bittern had left the nest as the boar-marten plunged into the thicket, and her warning call was answered by her mate a short distance away. Although he answered, and came hurrying to the spot, it was too late.

Hardly had the mother bittern alighted on a grass hummock than she was seized and killed by a pair of the furred horde, and two seconds later her mate met a similar death. As for the fledgling bitterns, they had no time to protest before a swarming mass of marten was over them.

But the cry of the bitterns served a purpose after all. For, like a tocsin, it was caught up, echoed and re-echoed all over the swamp. *Danger!* The Spearmen knew that their sanctuary was being invaded. And they chanted their hoarse battle-cry.

Louder and deeper than the voice of any blue heron in all that company was the clarion call of Krog, mighty ruler of the swamp!

KROG had been fishing at the upper end of the swamp when that last warning of the bitterns was sounded. The first cry of the mother might have been interpreted as some alarm she felt at the appearance of a weasel or a mink near her nest. But the answer of the male bittern, and then the hoarse screams which were cut off instantly as their makers met death, stirred the heron-leader.

Without knowing why, until that moment, his anxiety had been whetted to a keen edge that night, as though telepathic word of the coming of the marten horde had reached him.

Now he voiced his challenge. It was caught up and repeated by herons all over the swamp. He leaped into the air. Powerful pinions beating steadily, he struck out for home, his first thought being anxiety for his mate and little ones.

Yet as he stroked onward, a fierce, growing clamor swept the length of the swamp. The invading marten had reached other herons' nests and were meting out swift death. Above the hoarse screaming of the great birds could be heard the savage snarling of the martens as they encountered opposition on the part of parent birds.

Yet this opposition was brief at best. The martens were here, there and everywhere; the swamp was alive with them. And the herons, gripped with terror, could only flap above their nests and scream helplessly as their fledglings were slain. The air was full of beating wings and forlorn cries. Panicky, they seemingly could do nothing in the face of this devasting army.

Krog alighted at the edge of his nest, beside his mate, and teetered there with wings outspread, shouting defiance at the martens swarming about the place. His cries, however, only served to attract the little fiends to him. A dozen of them ran up the tamarack toward the nest.

Startled, Krog's mate leaped into the air, crying shrilly yet vainly, but the heron king was made of sterner stuff. As the head of one marten came up over the edge of the nest and the cruel eyes rested for a flickering instant on the fledglings, the poniard-like beak of Krog struck downward.

So great was the force of the blow that the marten's skull was actually punctured. With a snarling squall of rage and agony, it fell to the ground, writhing.

Ere another marten could escape Krog struck again, accurately cutting the jugular of the orange-red throat. A third time Krog smote, and a marten who was seeking to come upon the heron from behind, died as the terrible bony spear plunged into his heart.

They hesitated for an instant, then, for the spectacle of the aroused heron king was appalling. With wings out-

spread, neck curved for the death-stroke, feathers ruffled warningly. His reddened eyes snapped fire. The big bird was terrifying to behold. Even the murder-glutted marten hesitated.

THEN Krog screamed again. But this time it was in triumph and not in fear. His cry was caught up by the other herons and it stirred their courage. Another male heron, dropping on his own nest, killed a marten who had just torn out the throat of a fledgling. This male heron's cry was added to that of Krog's. Then a change swept over the hard-pressed birds. From a rout, a defeat, they had been suddenly rallied by the fighting courage of Krog!

And in their rage they would not be stopped. Reckless of their own lives, once that first shock was over, and emboldened by the success of Krog and the other male heron, the birds fell upon the enemy with those deadly yellowish spears.

Beaks that were powerful enough to pierce a fish weighing several pounds, breaking its spine, found their mark in the furry invaders. Even though the herons were outnumbered, the protective instinct on behalf of their young made them gladiators of the first rank.

The martens wavered for an instant, then broke into flight. But the vengeful herons would not permit them to escape so easily. Time after time a marten who was skulking beneath a grass hummock was detected and impaled by a spear-like beak. Many others of the scurrying slayers died in fight.

True, the martens, too, took heavy toll of their foes. An over-venturesome heron, eager to kill, would be seized beneath the wing, and the sharp cutting fangs of the martens would slash the great artery. It was in this manner that Krog's mate met death.

But the heron king made his stand at the nest, in defense of his young. Three more martens he slew there and it seemed that they had left the place. Krog was on the point of flapping off to give pursuit to the fleeing enemy, when the horrid visage of the boar-marten poked over the edge of the nest.

Krog struck, but missed. Then the big marten leaped for the bird, seized a mouthful of skin and feathers. With sharp claws, he sought to hang on while he set his teeth deeper.

Had Krog been a heron of ordinary size, it would have seemed that the marten must succeed. But the heron king was big and had a powerful wing-spread.

As the marten seized him, Krog, screaming hoarsely, leaped into the air, hoping to dislodge or break the hold of the marten. In this he nearly achieved his aim. The body of the marten swung wildly outward, yet with foreclaws and fangs he hung on. The next instant, with wings beating strongly, Krog soared upward.

But it was a vain effort. He could not get free of his deadly foe. The weight of the marten was almost more than the heron could support. Still screaming, while with great beak he struck repeatedly at the furry body clinging to him, Krog slanted down to earth. He struck heavily in a green-scummed pool.

The two of them plunged under water. The marten loosed its hold for a moment, confused by the sudden threat of drowning. Before he could regain it, the stilt-like legs of Krog carried the bird clear. He could have made off in safety then, but Krog's fighting blood was aroused. Whirling, he came at the marten once more.

To the credit of the marten, it must be said that he met the attack without fear. Snarling his battle-cry, he leaped for the heron's neck.

Yet he might as well have attempted to seize a moon-beam. The slender neck of the heron writhed, as the beak was hurled forward and downward, like a shortened javelin. It struck the boar-marten full in the throat and was as quickly withdrawn.

The marten fell, writhing. Again and again the terrible beak counted coup. Nor did Krog desist until there was not so much as a quiver left in the marten's body, to indicate that life might still exist.

AT last, Krog straightened up. He smoothed his feathers, stretched his neck as he scanned the swamp. Almost as abruptly as it had begun, the fight had ended. Survivors of the marten horde were scattered and in full flight. Many of the Spearmen were dead, yet they had given noble account of themselves ere the end came. There was heavy mortality, too, among the fledglings.

Presently, Krog lifted into the air, and flapped back to his nest. His mate was gone. He did not know then that she was dead, but the very fact that she was missing undoubtedly suggested her fate. The fledglings, however, were unharmed, thanks to the valiance of their father.

Krog settled himself on the edge of the nest and preened himself carefully. He was sorely hurt, where the sharp teeth of the boar-marten had cut him deeply. Yet he would live. He *must* live, for that matter, because upon him and him alone now rested the responsibility of caring for the fledglings.

Already they were clamorous at sight of him. Their terror had vanished in the face of his presence. They were young and forget quickly; moreover, they were very hungry. Krog eyed them for a full minute, as though he was marshaling the facts of the situation in his mind.

It may have occurred to him—although it is quite likely that it did not—that in the part he played in the bloody battle just ended, he was but a humble instrument in the hands of an all-wise nature.

When nature's wild predatory children, such as the martens, become too numerous, it seems that she cleverly plots their downfall. Perhaps the marten, who need fear only their bigger and fiercer cousins, the wolverine and the pekan, or fisher, were becoming too numerous for the welfare of rabbits, grouse and squirrels. Perhaps, too, there were too many blue herons in relation to frogs and fish in the swamp, according to nature's reasoning.

In any event, there were fewer herons and martens at this moment than there were a scant half hour before. Perhaps nature was satisfied.

And Krog had acquitted himself as befits one who is king of his kind. And, although there was a stern task awaiting him, in rearing his youngsters unaided, he did not quail at it.

As their hunger cries became more insistent, Krog took off from the nest. He winged over to his favorite fishing pool, quite as if nothing unusual had happened.

Killer law ruled the Rio, and Santo, the Mex, was king. . . . Until they branded Sparky Green a rustler, and he rode a two-gun trail to blot the brand with a cross that he stuck in the sand of boot hill. Read T. W. Ford's complete cowboy novel, "The Ridin' Kid," in the current issue of LARIAT STORY MAGAZINE—now on the stands.

World Adventurers is a fraternal band of brother adventurers and globe-trotters from the four lanes of the earth, banded together in a genuine he-man association under the banner of *Frontier Stories*. To be a member, a man must possess the staunch heart of an adventurer, tried and tested on the far-flung out-trails, or have a real desire to be one.

Members of the A. E. F., and Allied Armies, the Foreign Legion, the Army, Navy or Marine Corps, the Merchant Marine, the Coast Guard, the Aviation Service—all are eligible for the ranks of the *World Adventurers'* clan. Others must prove they are adventurers of the real stripe. If you've undergone some grueling experience, hunted thrills in distant climes, been close to the horrors of shipwreck, railroaded, stalked game, explored beyond the bailiwick of white men, shipped before the mast, ridden behind the "joy stick"—in fact rubbed shoulders with danger in any form—you're entitled to enroll in the Brotherhood of He-Men.

To apply for membership, fill out the coupon below. If you are accepted, you'll receive a durable membership identification card, free of charge, a positive, automatic identification passport the world over. You are then permitted to wear the button pictured above, the talisman and symbol of the adventure crew. With *World Adventurers* in gold lettering on a black background along the rim, the button is a reproduction of the globe with the land in gold relief and the water in a royal blue enamel, a flashing design worthy of the organization. The price, post prepaid and registered, is only fifty cents. No membership or initiation fees. Members of *World Adventurers* are entitled to become staff correspondents to *Frontier Stories* at regular space rates.

To play the game hard and square—to stick by a pal to the bitter end—to give every man a clean deal—that's the man-code of *World Adventurers!*

OCTOBER! In northern latitudes the days are growing noticeably shorter, and there's a hint of winter in the evening air. The green fields are rapidly turning brown and the forests are glorious in their multi-colored foliage.

Each falling leaf grazing a World Adventurer brings with it the urge to move onward, and to vision new scenes. The warm lands beckon enticingly—there is yet time to dodge the chilly blasts of November. Why linger to feel the pinch of Jack Frost's icy fingers?

Close to the Line are strange and colorful countries in which to adventure.

Stroll down to the docks and smell the odor of coffee as it is unloaded from the murky depths of ocean-going steamers. The beautiful harbor of Rio de Janeiro pops into view as if drawn by a magic pencil or flashed on a screen.

Banana boats fly the emblems of Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Honduras—and other sections of Central America. Parrots scream raucous Spanish pro-

fanity. Swarthy stewards on the West Indian liners hurry up the gang plank with baggage marked for Havana, Puerto Plata, San Juan, Charlotte Amalia, Curacao. Cast-off cables splash as they strike the water—there is the clatter of winches...Sights and sounds and smells you know.

Chances are that the lad with the itchy hoof will wander back to a park bench and seat himself. Yeah—the shoes will need half-soling. Better step in and have the job done right away. Two pair of shoes are superfluous. One suitcase will be about right. That'll hold enough clothes to last a man clean around the world.

Let's see. Venezuela ought to be a good bet. The oil fields near Maracaibo always hold a job for a good man who's anxious to locate one. Colombia —there's always road construction going on among the hills. That little bank roll saved during the summer is going to come in plumb handy right now. The wanderer who knows how, can travel far on little.

Who-o-o!

The boat's whistling, ***compañeros.*** Time to be on our way.

World Adventurers contribute regularly to this department, and suitable material is bought at our regular rates.

Hunters' Law

IT happened in Southeastern Alaska. I was hired by a small cannery company which was building a dock and plant for storing meat. We paid little attention to game laws in those days and took what we needed from the forests and streams. We had two laws—the law of northern hospitality and the hunters' law.

One afternoon as I sat in camp cleaning a small-bored shotgun, the baying of hounds sounded on the mountain. Out of the thicket burst a fat buck. He was racing down the trail of a brook as if seeking the beach.

My only shells close at hand were loaded with the finest of bird shot—"dust" we called it. Jamming two shells home, I let drive with both barrels.

The deer was less than twenty feet away. He fell. As he rose again a half-breed named Mike Welch came running from the bunk-house. He was carrying a .22 special Winchester. His first shot, through the head, killed the buck instantly. The half-breed whipped out his knife and leaped into the brook to cut the animal's throat.

I followed. For under hunter's law half of that *mowitch* was mine. I had struck the game.

"Wotcher want?" grunted the 'breed, rising from his bloody task and holding the dripping knife in his hand.

"My half," I replied. "It was my 'dust' that knocked the deer down. You saw him fall."

"You never touched him," snarled Mike, his black eyes snapping. "There's none of this venison for you."

And that was that.

In an instant we were in a clinch, with the 'breed trying to knife me. Providentially Mike's foot slipped on a loose stone and he fell. He dragged me with him.

By this time some of the boys from the bunk-house had arrived. One of them kicked the 'breed's knife from his hand. Then I felt a hand on my shoulder, and Mike and I were torn apart. It was the 'breed's father, Red Maxwell, a former British marine who had deserted from Esquimalt, B. C., years ago and had married a Thlinket squaw.

"What's the trouble?" he queried. Both Mike and I tried to explain.

"I'll damned soon settle this argument," rumbled Red. He picked up the knife his son had wielded and skilfully flayed the deer. Tiny red spots on the animal's breast bore out my statement. They were the marks of the "dust."

"Hunters law" was the squaw-man's brief comment. He swiftly halved the kill and gave each of us our piece of venison. He led Mike away by the arm.

Next morning Mike Welch was missing from the dock gang. I wasn't sorry. A 'breed is a mean enemy in the woods; and a 'breed, like a full-blood, never forgets.

C. A. FREEMAN.

How's Tricks By You?

The rest of us want to hear what you are doing, *amigo.* And where? And how?

Is it Singapore or Rio? The ice-bound heights of the Himalayas or the jungles of the Amazon country? The Fall winds are calling and we must be on the prod. Drop us a line to let the rest of the fellow-adventurers know what breaks a man can expect along your trail.

This is a regular department of World Adventurers. If you have information that you think your fellow members would like, spread yourself. This is your place.

The Sewing Machine Trail

THE sewing machine trail! Sounds a bit feminine, doesn't it? On the contrary it often leads to strange adventures, for the sewing machine expert in automobiles, on horseback, sometimes on foot, penetrates to the farthest reaches of "back of beyond."

If I were a young man anxious to see out-of-the-way places and earn good wages at the same time, I'd join up with one of the big sewing machine outfits and learn the rudiments of the sales and repairing end. Then I'd ask for a job in one of the outports and see what lay beyond the next hill. The language will come with experience on the job.

Personally I have always been glad that I did a bit with the "Singer" people—agent in Manila. Out in the Islands the agents travel in their own cars or with motorcycle side-car outfits. In off-duty hours they often enjoy excellent hunting. Fishing, however, is not on the list, for the white man cannot do that without losing caste. When the Filipino peasant sees a *lalaki puti*—a white man—with a hook and line he concludes that he's on the bum.

The West Indies, of course, have their sewing machine agents. But these islands, more highly civilized, cannot offer as much in the way of adventure as Asia and South America. Traveling constantly as he does, the *Maquina* man comes in contact with all classes. He is able to locate business opportunities overlooked by town dwellers. I know several ex-Singer men in the Far East who are quite wealthy.

Of the present wages paid for this work, I cannot speak definitely, but I know that they are always good. The Singer people, in the Philippines at least, pay each week, rather than by the usual monthly payments necessitating the signing of credit slips.

One thing is certain—nothing has yet been invented that beats the sewing machine for its line of work. Hand embroidery is making way for the embroidery done on them, and even the Eskimo dames are machine-sewing their furs.

G-strings for head-hunters in the tropics! Yeah, I've seen 'em being stitched on machines by lowland women. Moro women in the Sulus travel with their husbands in sailing *vintas*, stitching away on hand-operated machines. The skin-tight trousers and the scanty but gorgeous jackets—the turn-out delights the male Moro.

The man who handles the sales or repairing end of the sewing machine job, takes in the whole show. It's not a bad job at all, compañeros.

In practically every town in the United States the sewing machine agencies should be able to give more information than I can in the space allotted by *Frontier Stories*. Look 'em up, brethren of the itchy hoof, if you're interested.

HARRY ELMO.

WORD FROM THE WORLD'S FRONTIERS

Is there a place, far out on civilization's ragged edge, that you've missed in your travels? Some sun-blistered isle in an out-of-the-way corner of the far South Seas? A frozen plain in the black wastes of snow laden Alaska? A somnolent, little-known cow town of our own Southwest? Would you like first-hand information about these places from men who have ranged far in the outlands of the world? If you would, send in your queries—and we'll see that your letter is forwarded to the man you pick from the list below. Here's the line-up, folks. They're trained observers—and adventurers all! Address your inquiries to World Adventurers, Frontier Stories, 271 Madison Avenue, New York.

Northwest, Alaska, Australia..A. de H. Smith
Far East.....Arthur J. Burks
South America.....Harry F. Olmsted
Southwest.....Dick Halliday
North Cow Country.....Walt Coburn
Philippines, West Indies.....C. A. Freeman
Mexican Border.....Eugene Cunningham
Exploration and Adventure-trips
C. A. Freeman
Rodeo Information.....Walt Sinclair
Aviation .....R. A. Carter

Take the Air

PAUL DAVISON, Dallas, Texas.

Q. I wonder what you could tell me about getting hold of an airplane, and about how much one would have to pay. I'd like to take a flight about the States. I know nothing about flying, yet.

A. You shouldn't have as many difficulties as one might think. If you go over to Stinson Field, which is in San Antonio, I'm sure that you can pick a plane for five hundred dollars. They've been used a bit, but the motors are still in good shape.

Some of the boys there will give you a little instruction for a few dollars—I'm sure that they'd do the thing for fifty. Playing around a field like that for a week or so would accustom you with the needs of your plane and trip. Stinson, or it was when I was there, is a hang-out for men who are wandering about the country doing things of that sort.

There were about ten planes of the kind I speak of at the time I was there.

They sold from $350 to $700. They were all Curtiss, and quite airworthy. You can make about 250 miles at a hop with them, and you can carry a load of three hundred pounds.

I don't know why more people aren't doing that sort of thing. It's all quite safe. Anyway, it is worth the trial. Just keep your head, that's all. I knew of one young fellow who came into the place, got his plane, and twenty hours in the air, for $400. When I saw him he was going back to his home over in Utah. I'm sure that no one in the village where he lived knew that he was coming home in such a manner. Drop us a line and tell us how things go.

ROBERT A. CARTER.

A Birthday Present

Dear Chief:

The 17th of September is my birthday. So for the September issue of *Frontier Stories* loosen up some hot yarns and don't be Scotch about it either. Say, don't forget to tell J. E. Grinstead to write another story like *Rangers of the Rio.*

I'll be glad to get twenty cents for a birthday present so I can buy the October issue of *Frontier.*

W. J. No. 5005.

P. S. Don't forget to loosen up a couple of hot yarns.

Editor's Note—Well, here it is! What say? Didn't every yarn hit the mark? Happy birthday, W. J!

First Mate Signs On

Dear Chief:

I have just finished my first issue of *Frontier Stories* and it sure does hit the spot. Wish you'd sign me on for the World Adventurers.

I have been around the world about three times and if anybody is interested in Europe, Asia, Russia or the Orient, I'll be glad to tell him what I can. I used to be first mate on the steamer *My Mother,* a thousand-ton coastal boat running between Vancouver and San Francisco. It was scrapped about two years ago in Vancouver.

Frontier Stories is sure a great magazine. It recalls many old memories. I was about to try and name one of the stories that hit my fancy, but I may as well send you the page of contents, as they are all aces.

J. W. MAHONEY.
No. 5006.

FRONTIER STORIES INFORMATION BUREAU

WANTS A SNAKE SKIN—any size or color, but must be well preserved. Willing to pay cash or trade. Jack Albert Busby, No. 5063.

NEWARK "W. A.'s" are asked to get in touch with this member. He lives in that city himself and is anxious to make some personal friends among the gang. Clarence E. Brown, No. 3747.

A STRANGER IN NEW YORK finds life in the big city lonesome and would like to strike up a correspondence with brother "World Adventurers" from any state in the Union. H. Hinson, No. 4681.

COAST GUARDER will swap letter yarns with any wanderer who likes action—and plenty of it. Has adventured in many out-of-the-way places and hopes to keep to the trail for many years to come. Robert J. Thompson, No. 4226.

IS ORGANIZING expedition to study the life and customs of South American natives. Is experienced traveler and adventurer. Any "World Adventurer" who is interested is invited to get in touch with George Nava, No. 5064.

BRITISH TOMMY, just signed up with the "W. A.'s" wants the whole outfit to know that he's mighty anxious to swap letters with any Yank member. He promises prompt replies to all communications. Jack Smale, No. 5065.

SON OF THE OUT TRAILS will swap adventure yarns and trail information with any other "World Adventurer." Is anxious to hear from wanderers from all parts of the world. Robert Collins, Jr., No. 4650.

HIS HOBBY is finger printing and he'd be glad to strike up a letter discussion with all **Frontier Stories** readers who are interested in that subject. William T. Johnson, No. 3984.

ENGLISH BROTHER is fed up on the quiet life and rarin' to go. Can any one—here or abroad—put him in touch with some live-wire job that will take him around the world a bit? Jack Dodd, No. 5061.

WILL TRADE yarns and experiences with any other "World Adventurer." Is familiar with Portugal, Spain, and parts of South America. Chif. Le Carpentier, No. 5060.

FIELD ARTILLERYMAN has visited many parts of the world and is anxious to make some letter friends among the "World Adventurers." He promises to answer all letters promptly. Robert Stanley Wilson, No. 5062.

Secretary, WORLD ADVENTURERS, 10-29

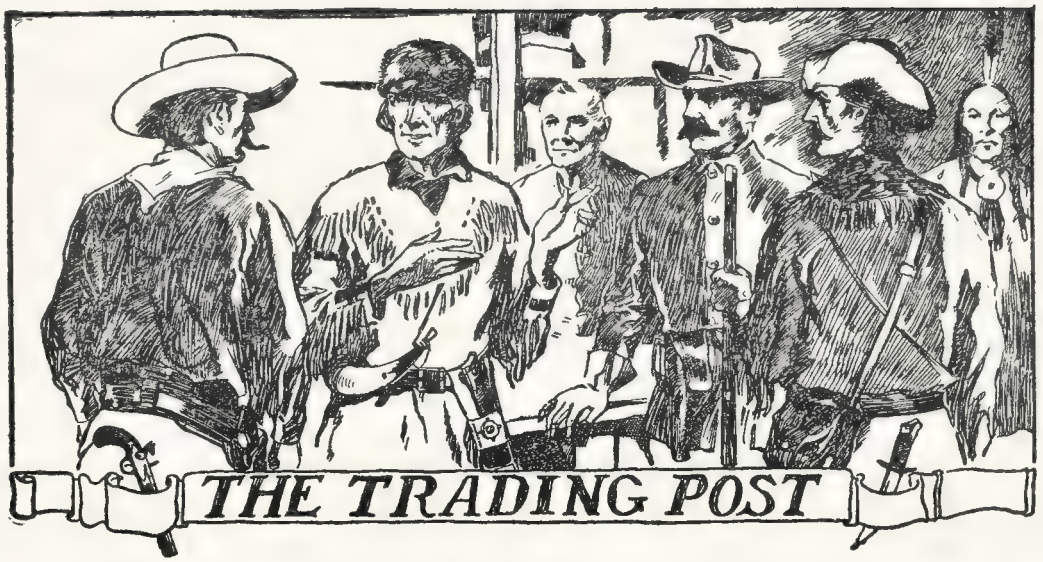
Frontier Stories, 271 Madison Avenue, New York City.

Please send me an application blank for membership enrollment in the World Adventurers. No initiation charge, no membership fee. Everything free to me as a reader of Frontier Stories.

Name.....

Street.....

City.....**State**.....



A HUNGRY loop has no conscience. Keep your nerve cold and your runnin' iron hot, and it marks the way to great herds, rangeland empire. *But* it's whole-hog or none. There's no middle course. For a careless loop leads to bitter pay-off—a long rope and a short prayer.

The West was too small for the three on that border range. But Rance Lewis was playin' his string out . . . Nerve? He had it. He was sticking for showdown. He didn't mind backing his play with six-guns. And he boosted the jackpot with chips of blood.

Then he fumbled the cards. Acrid tang of burnt flesh was in the air. A brandin' iron filled his gun-hand . . . Rance Lewis cornered—with hair-trigger Colts leveled at his middle. They gave him the choice of fannin' their guns or taking a stretch in the big-house. Those were their terms; no choice at all, Rance Lewis figured. But he promised to follow their trail.

Lewis kept his word. He followed their trail—for a while. He followed their trail till the time came to cross it, and that was this side of the cabin of doom. When the three got to Latigo Creek and the ill-fated cabin, they found their odds and took them—one against two.

Lightning glinted on raised gun muzzles. Storm drove ugly shadows to the shelter of crumpling log walls. And from the massive rafters hung two ghastly symbols of a killer's goal—the hangman's noose.

Yes, Rance Lewis' rope looped a peck of trouble; a hornets' nest—and the hornet sting was lethal lead.

Walt Coburn tells the story in the next issue of *Frontier Stories*. If you like fast action, stirring adventure, gripping drama, you'll like Walt Coburn's next western novelet, "Smoking Guns." It's a corker.

In the same issue you will find Victor Rousseau's latest novel, "Hawks of the Himalayas." It's a rapid-fire, colorful tale of an airman's daring fight beyond the forbidden frontier of Tibet. To the very heart of an Oriental despot's stronghold he probed. For the name of the Service had been stained with the blood of a rack-broken buddy.

On the contents page of that issue you will find the names of several more of your old favorites. James P. Olsen will appear, with a story of western feud: A. de Herries Smith, with a sequel to the yarn of his that you've read in

this issue. There will be stories by Lynn Boyd Condé, Robinson Lee, K. Christopher Barr and many others.

It's another all-star number of *Frontier*. Our advice to you is—get to the newsstand early.

The Missing Lighthouse

Warren Hastings Miller returns in this issue of *Frontier Stories* with a new tale of Captain Jim Colvin and Johnny Pedlow. He has promised to write more of their adventures in the Far Eastern seas. Here's what he says about the background to the story in this issue:

I always liked those two boys who share the honors in *The Missing Lighthouse;* think we can get a lot of stories out of them. They bought the *Siburu* on a shoe-string from Shaffino in Algiers and went trading in the Malay Archipelago with her. If you have ever been in Algiers you will recall Shaffino's fleet of small steamerettes.

This one could only get fourteen inches of vacuum and her stay tubes were in bad shape, but Johnny fixed her up. We found the main valve of the air pump all gone and pieces of it in the checks. Made a new one of brass and the vacuum jumped to 24. Shaffino was some surprised to see her steaming out of there at a higher speed than they could ever get out of her.

WARREN HASTINGS MILLER.

Injury Is No Anchor to Him

Dear Chief:

I am inclosing an application blank for membership enrollment in the World Adventurers.

Just a few words about myself. I am a seaman by profession, or should say I was up until the time of an accident which layed me up. I enlisted in the U. S. Navy when I was 18 years old. I was at Vera Cruz in 1914. At that time I was an O. S. aboard the *U. S. S. Salem.*

During the World War I was in the patrol service aboard two different small boats, the *U. S. S. Dorothea* and the *U. S. S. Eagle.* After the war I studied navigation at the U. S. Shipping Board School at Cleveland, and got my Third Mate's license. I worked as Third Mate until an injury which I received while overseeing the loading of cargo aboard the *S. S. Lake Fiscus* at Salonika, Greece.

At the present time I am living where the tall corn grows, but do not expect to stay long. I am looking for a place about like The Grenadines, as Harry Elmo describes in his article in the July number of *Frontier Stories.* I have read *Frontier Stories* for the last two or three years and expect to keep on reading them as long as I can get them and my eye sight remains good.

RAYMOND R. RANNEY.
Maynard, Iowa.

Ten Times Better

Dear Chief:

The first time I saw *Frontier Stories* it was run by Doubleday & Doran. Just as soon as I read one story in it I said to myself, "From now on I'm going to buy *Frontier Stories.*" Since then I have been reading this magazine regularly. Last week I was surprised to see that *Frontier Stories* was run by Fiction House. Now I like it ten times better.

Will you please tell some of the authors of this book to write a cowboy-Indian story or an aeroplane-war story. And tell J. E. Grinstead to write another Ranger yarn.

These are the stories I liked best so far: *Night Raid, Snaring the Sea Fox, Right Smack at You, Wings in the Spanish Legion, John Doe's Ghost, Birds of Warning, Lure of Lost Men, Rangers of the Rio, Hand Made Hero, Code of the Mounted, Loot of the Temple.*

Well, so-long and I hope you tell your authors about my wishes.

WILLIAM JANCZUK,
New York City.

Editor's Note—Your wishes will be granted. How did you like Walt Coburn's off-trail cowboy-Indian novelet in this issue—and J. E. Grinstead's latest Texas yarn? There will be others of the same type in the coming issues of *Frontier Stories.* And we are keeping the editorial eye peeled for a few A-1 air-war stories.

Remote American Frontier

Editor *Frontier:*

There's little for a gob to do after his duties are performed, down here at Guantanamo Bay, and most of us pass the time in reading. *Frontier* seems to hit my fancy, and I've given the Station news dealer orders to hold me out a copy in case my boat is away when the magazines arrive.

The naval station here is probably the least known of all Americas' frontiers. Our *liberties* are all made in Cuban territory.

I sure like the new blood that *Frontier* is showing.

JOHN COLLINS,
Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Word from the Rockies

Dear Editor:

I'm vacationing in the mountains. The Rockies were once a frontier, but the pioneers crossed them. Yesterday in a deserted cabin I found a copy of *Frontier Stories* two years old. The present magazine is much better.

STILLMAN FULLER,
Central City, Colo.

Applause from Afar

Dear Editor:

American magazines are on sale even here in Rio, for the city possesses a large colony of English speaking people. Recently I read my first *Frontier* and enjoyed it immensely, although because I am a German I read English with some difficulty. Your magazine is most interesting, and I will continue to purchase it.

HANS PFEFFER,
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

He's Been Around

Dear Secretary:

I am inclosing the World Adventurers coupon found in the July issue of *Frontier Stories.*

I'm not quite twenty years old, but I've done my bit of rambling. Soon after my sixteenth birthday I quit school and started rolling.

I've sailed as ordinary seaman up and down the East Coast half a dozen times, and I've been in Germany, Sweden, Mexico and Venezuela in the same capacity.

I'm hogging for the telephone company now trying to collect a little stake so I can build a one-man sloop and continue my travels a little more comfortably than in a box car.

I wish some of the World Adventurers could be here in Crescent City, Calif., a few months from now. The deer season opens then, and they're thick as flies.

CECIL B. WORLY,
Crescent City, Calif.

STRAIGHT TO THE BULL'S-EYE

YOU'LL find the cream of the fiction crop in the magazines that wear the Bull's-Eye. Every month they bring you stories that are hand-picked to hit your reading taste, that satisfy because they are built to a 100% standard. People who know what reading pleasure means know that you can't go wrong when you bet your two thin dimes on the FICTION HOUSE Bull's-Eye.

Let's take a look at the line-up for October. There's *Action Stories* with as fine a collection of rapid-fire action adventure yarns as you'll find on any newsstand. Another great Coburn Western novel, "Trigger Feud," leads the spread. You'll like Rusty Corrigan and Nan Benner and Gip, the three true-life characters whose story Coburn tells—and you'll learn to know and hate and fear the Jimson clan of sagebrush killers, who'd sworn never to rest while a Benner still breathed the breath of life. And while the adventure spirit reigns, why not go a-roamin' between the covers of *Frontier?* Maybe the mystic land of white-robed desert raiders and the scarlet demons of France, of lethal cutlass and deadly musket, of white sun and white sand—northern Africa—maybe that land suits your taste. Then you'll like Bob Du Soe's gripping frontier novel, "The Shanghaied Legionnaire."

Dive into *Air Stories* for October and follow mile-high trails of sky adventure. Read "Flying Fish," complete novel by George Bruce—the story of two eagles of the Yank Navy, of grim reprisal against U-boats in the Channel, of battling scouts sky-pointing Navy guns against Hindenburg's horde. . . . Plunge into Papuan jungle with "The Thunder Ship," Herman Petersen's complete air novel which leads the flight in *Wings.* The saga of white-man's magic daring jungle-man's sorcery, of knavery and courage, on dim trails where spears are law. . . . Fred Davis has spun into the tarmac of *Aces* with "The Doomed Three," who rode through war-reddened skies with the wings of death—an epic of our flying men on the Western Front. It is the first of three great novels of our airmen.

Lariat pulls its first six-gun in a month with "The Sheriff Killer," by Jay Lucas. It's one of the fastest-firing novels that has come out of the West in a long time; and it is followed by six short shots—and they don't miss! In *North•West Stories,* T. F. T. West breaks the trail for a string of hard-drivin', hard-ridin' writers of range and snow lands. In the line-up are W. C. Tuttle, Jack Bechdolt, Tom J. Hopkins, A. deHerries Smith, Sewell Peaslee Wright and others.

Action Novels, the magazine of boiled-down, pepped-up, novel-length adventure fiction, comes to bat with an all-star line-up of four complete novels. There's a bang-up baseball yarn by Herbert L. McNary, a Western by Walt Coburn, an amazing tale of South-Sea mystery by Nels Leroy Jorgensen and a different sort of adventure yarn by Jack Rohan. And if you like the knockout punch of the prize-ring, the thud of leather against flesh, the thrill of the haymaker—well, *Fight Stories* gives you these on every page. Sunny Jim Coffroth, Hype Igoe, Jimmy DeForest and other noted sports authorities pack them into each issue.

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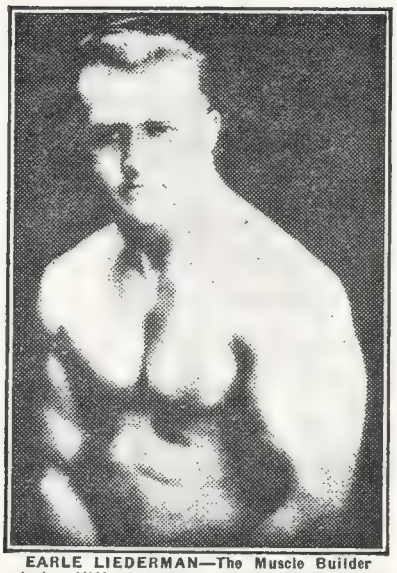

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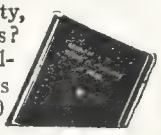

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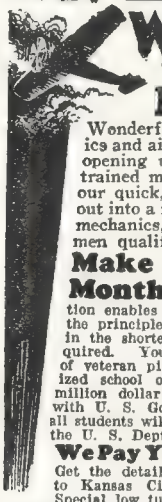

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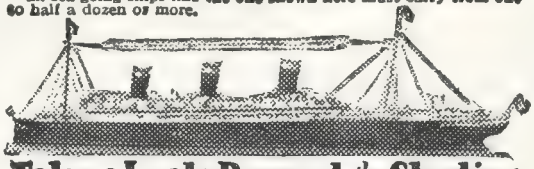

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Walter Hinton, the world-famous Trans-Atlantic pilot will train you QUICKLY—right at home—for a big-pay place in Aviation. In a course of instruction which experts pronounce the most remarkable ever produced, he will give you the facts about plane construction, motors, theory of flight, navigation, instruments, and a whole lot more. He gives you the practical knowledge you need to fill ANY job in ANY branch of Commercial Aviation. Furthermore, he helps you get that job—helps you turn his training into actual cash. All over the country, men who are now actively engaged in Aviation owe their start and their success to Hinton. Get the facts QUICK. Find out how he can train and start YOU.

FREE BOOK

This FREE Book, "Wings of Opportunity," is your first step to Success. If you are 18 years of age or older, clip the coupon and send for your FREE copy —**right now.**

Aviation Institute of U.S.A.
Walter Hinton, Pres.
1115 Connecticut Avenue, Washington, D. C.

Rush back to Washington!

9-Z

Send at once my FREE copy of your book, "Wings of Opportunity."

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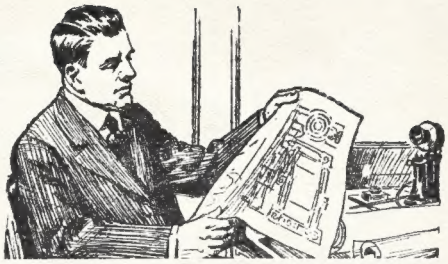

Mechanical Engineering

Learn at Home

MECHANICAL Engineering embraces the design, construction and operation of machines and machine tools. It is a profession which offers almost unlimited opportunities to men who combine natural mechanical ability with technical training.

For this is The Age of Machinery. Almost every convenience, luxury or necessity which we enjoy depends on machinery for its production or adaptability to our needs. Every new invention multiplies the opportunities for competent designers, builders, erecting engineers, etc.

One of the best ways to train yourself to secure a position as a Mechanical Engineer is through the home-study courses of the International Correspondence Schools.

These courses are complete and up-to-date, and especially arranged to meet the needs of the student who studies at home.

They are particularly helpful because they are written by well-known mechanical engineers with years of practical experience, who know the quickest, best way to solve every problem.

Just mark and mail the coupon and we'll gladly send you Free Booklets describing the I. C. S. courses in Mechanical Engineering or any other course in which you are interested.

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
Box 4182-B, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the course *before* which I have marked X in the list below:

☐ **Mechanical Engineering**	☐ **Toolmaking**
☐ **Mechanical Course**	☐ **Blacksmithing and Forging**
☐ **Drafting**	☐ **Patternmaking**
☐ **Mechanical Drawing**	☐ **Foundrywork**
☐ **Complete Shop Practice**	☐ **Machine Shop Practice**
☐ Architect	☐ Plumber and Steam Fitter
☐ Architectural Draftsman	☐ Plumbing Inspector
☐ Building Foreman	☐ Foreman Plumber
☐ Concrete Builder	☐ Heating and Ventilation
☐ Contractor and Builder	☐ Sheet-Metal Worker
☐ Structural Draftsman	☐ Steam Engineer
☐ Structural Engineer	☐ Marine Engineer
☐ Electrical Engineer	☐ Refrigeration Engineer
☐ Electrical Contractor	☐ R. R. Positions
☐ Electric Wiring	☐ Highway Engineer
☐ Electric Lighting	☐ Chemistry ☐ Pharmacy
☐ Electric Car Running	☐ Mining Engineer
☐ Telegraph Engineer	☐ Navigation ☐ Assayer
☐ Telephone Work	☐ Iron and Steel Worker
☐ Civil Engineer	☐ Textile Overseer or Supt.
☐ Surveying and Mapping	☐ Cotton Manufacturing
☐ Bridge Engineer	☐ Woolen Manufacturing
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☐ Accounting and C. P. A. Coaching	☐ Civil Service
	☐ Railway Mail Clerk
☐ Cost Accounting	☐ Mail Carrier
☐ Bookkeeping	☐ Common School Subjects
☐ Spanish ☐ French	☐ High School Subjects
☐ Salesmanship	☐ Cartooning
☐ Advertising	☐ Illustrating

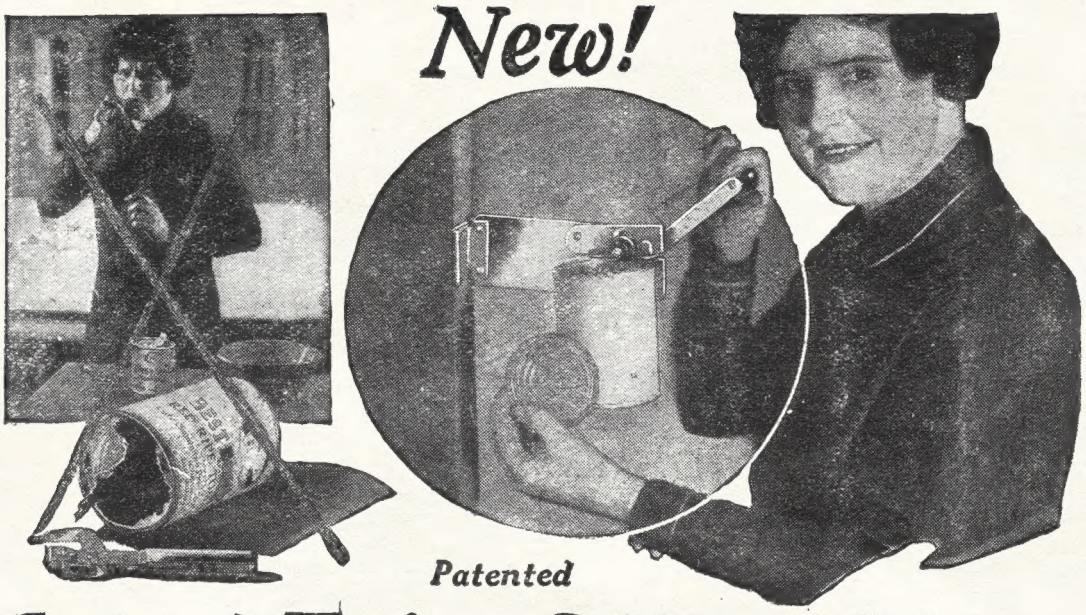
Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

Occupation.....

If you reside in Canada, send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada



Patented

Just A Twist Of The Wrist

Banishes Old-Style Can Openers to the Scrap Heap and BRINGS AGENTS $5 to $12 IN AN HOUR

WOMEN universally detest the old-style can opener. Yet in every home in the land cans are being opened with it, often several times a day. Imagine how thankfully they welcome this new method—this automatic way of doing their most distasteful job. With the Speedo can opening machine you can just put the can in the machine, turn the handle, and almost instantly the job is done.

End This Waste and Danger

You undoubtedly know what a nasty, dangerous job it is to open cans with the old-fashioned can opener. You have to hack your way along slowly—ripping a jagged furrow around the edge. Next thing you know, the can opener slips. Good night! You've torn a hole in your finger. As liable as not it will get infected and stay sore a long time. Perhaps even your life will be endangered from blood poisoning!

You may be lucky enough to get the can open without cutting yourself. But there's still the fact to consider that the ragged edge of tin left around the top makes it almost impossible to pour out all of the food. Yet now, all this trouble, waste and danger is ended. No wonder salesmen everywhere are finding this invention a truly revolutionary money maker!

A "Million Dollar" Can Opening Machine

The Speedo holds the can—opens it—flips up the lid so you can grab it—and gives you back the can without a drop spilled, without any rough edges to snag your fingers—all in a couple of seconds! It's so easy even a 10-year-old child can do it in perfect safety! No wonder women—and men, too—simply go wild over it! No wonder Speedo salesmen often sell to every house in the block and make up to $10 an hour.

Generous Free Test Offer

Frankly, men I realize that the profit possibilities of this proposition as outlined briefly here may seem almost incredible to you. So I've worked out a plan by which you can examine the invention and test its profit without risking one penny.

Get my free test offer while the territory you want is still open—I'll hold it for you while you make the test. I'll send you all the facts about $75 to $150 a week. I'll also tell you about another fast selling item that brings you two profits on every call. All you risk is a 2c stamp—so grab your pencil and shoot me the coupon right now.

CENTRAL STATES MFG. CO., Dept. M-2643
4500 Mary Ave., (Est. over 20 years) St. Louis, Mo.

AGENTS!

Full Time $265 in a Week

"Here is my record for first 30 days with Speedo:
June 13, 60 Speedos;
June 20, 84 Speedos;
June 30, 192 Speedos;
July 6, 288 Speedos.
Speedo sells to 9 out of 10 prospects."
M. Ornoff, Va.

PART TIME
14 Sales in 2 Hours
J. J. Corwin, Ariz., says: "Send more order books. I sold first 14 orders in 2 hours."

SPARE TIME
Big Money Spare Time
Barb, W. Va., says: "Was only out a few evenings, and got 20 orders."

$2,000.00 PRIZES

Now Being Given in Cash to Agents. Write for Details.

SPEEDO

Central States Mfg. Co.
4500 Mary Ave., Dept. M-2643
St. Louis, Mo.

Yes, rush me the facts and details of your FREE OFFER.

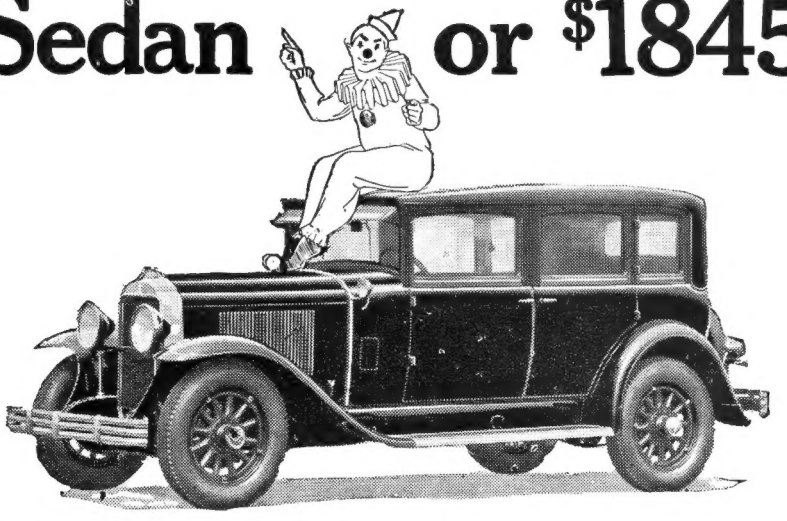
Name .....

Address .....

City..... State.....

☐ Check here if interested only in one for your home.

Who Else Wants to Win a Sedan or $1845.00?



Seven Six-Cylinder Sedans and Other Prizes Given

Puzzle fans, attention. To advertise we are giving a Nash Sedan, an Oldsmobile Sedan, a De Soto Sedan, a Pontiac Sedan, an Essex Sedan, a Whippet Sedan, and a Chevrolet Sedan, all delivered through nearest dealers, not to cost you a cent. We even pay delivery charges—many other prizes, including radios and so forth.

Mrs. D. H. Ziler, Louis J. Link, Margaret Needham, Mrs. M. E. Meadow, Alvin Smith, Charles Francis, Viola Javins, and numerous others won sedans through our last puzzle advertisements. Over 800 prizes awarded in one year through our unique advertising campaigns. Over $11,000.00 in prizes paid by us in one month. In next few months will award between 300 and 400 prizes through our puzzle advertisements. Here's the new one for you:

Find the Twin Clowns!

The clowns in the border of this advertisement probably will all look exactly alike to you at first glance. But they are not all alike. Two—only two—are exactly alike. Can you find them? The difference may be in the color or markings in the hat, collar, nose, or top of the head. Find the twins. Look carefully. Be sure you have them—then answer at once. You may be the one who will take up our offer.

And win Nash Sedan or $1845.00 Cash

Just think. There are seven sedans and many other prizes, including valuable radios, and so forth, totaling $7,300.00.* Duplicate prizes paid in case of ties. Surely you can win one of these wonderful prizes.

NO MORE PUZZLES TO SOLVE. No word lists to write or make up—no number puzzles to trace. We do this to advertise and expand our business No cost or obligation. Nothing to buy now, later or ever.

All who answer correctly can share in prizes or cash awards. Rewards for everyone taking an active part.

$500.00 For Promptness

Be prompt. Immediately, without delay, if your answer is correct, I will send you a certificate good for $500.00 if you are prompt and win first prize, and tell you why and how we make this unique advertising offer of free prizes. Just send the numbers of the twin clowns in a letter or on a post card. That's all. Send no money. All cars and other prizes are free, but be prompt.

*This offer guaranteed by a million-dollar concern.

FREE PRIZE JUDGE, 510 N. Dearborn St., Dept. 2, CHICAGO, ILL.

Good taste will always discover Camels

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